

Cabinet accepts Shukri's resignation

AMMAN (J.T.) — The government Tuesday accepted the resignation of Jordan Telecommunications Company Chairman Ali Shukri, said Information Minister Nasser Lawzi. The minister said Shukri's replacement has not yet been decided upon. Shukri, who accused new Telecommunications Minister Jamal Saraiheh of interference in the company's affairs, submitted his resignation Saturday to Prime Minister Abdur-Rahman S. Rawabdeh. In the letter, Shukri said Saraiheh ordered that a project to connect the Kingdom's schools to the Internet be stopped immediately. "We will be reviewing Shukri's business practices... to see how contracts were awarded and to who and if they were in line with guidelines set by the Audit Bureau," said another official. Shukri told the Jordan Times that Saraiheh also demanded by telephone that the firm immediately transfer JD12 million to the treasury, which "he has no right to ask." There was no official comment yet on the validity of Shukri's claims.

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King offers condolences to King Fahd

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Tuesday offered condolences by telephone to King Fahd of Saudi Arabia on the passing away of his first wife, Princess Al Unoud Bint Abdul Aziz Ben Mas'ad, the mother of Prince Faisal Ben Fahd. The Saudi monarch expressed his appreciation for King Abdullah's gesture. Also yesterday, King Abdullah sent two cables of condolences to King Fahd and Prince Faisal.

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Crown Prince condoles Saudi king, Bahraini emir

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Crown Prince Hamzah on Tuesday sent a cable of condolences to King Fahd of Saudi Arabia on the death of the king's first wife, Prince Hamzah wished the Saudi monarch continued health and happiness. On Monday, Prince Hamzah sent a cable of condolences to Bahraini Emir Sheikh Hamad Ben Isa Al Khalifeh on the passing away of Sheikh Isa Ben Salman Al Khalifeh. Earlier, Prince Hamzah visited the Bahraini embassy in London to offer condolences to Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ben Mubarak Al Khalifeh, Bahraini ambassador to the U.K.

Cabinet to hold dialogue on press law

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Cabinet plans to invite all sectors concerned with the local media to participate in a dialogue about the press and publications law and other related laws and regulations, sources close to the Cabinet told the Jordan Times on Tuesday.

Arafat expected in Amman today

GAZA (Petra) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat is due in Amman today, the head of Jordan's Representation Office, Ziyad Majali, said. Majali said Arafat will hold talks with His Majesty King Abdullah on bilateral relations, the latest developments in the Middle East peace process and issues of common concern.

Lockerbie nearly settled — Qadhafi

CAIRO (AFP) — Libyan President Muammar Qadhafi said Tuesday that "only a few small questions" remain to be settled before full agreement is reached on the Lockerbie affair. Qadhafi told Egyptian newspaper editors here that "all sides have agreed on the basis of a comprehensive solution" but there remain just a few small questions to be settled about guarantees, the Egyptian MENA news agency said. The Libyan leader is still asking for guarantees that economic sanctions will be lifted once the suspects are handed over and that no Libyans other than the suspects will face prosecution in the future, diplomats say.

'Barak cleared of blame in accident'

TEL AVIV (R) — Ex-army chief Ehud Barak, running for prime minister in Israel's May election, was cleared of blame in an official inquiry into a 1992 training accident that killed five soldiers. Israeli radio said on Tuesday. Barak, leader of the opposition Labour Party, has been dogged for years by accusations that he ignored wounded soldiers in the field. Six were injured when a missile exploded at an army base during an exercise, details of which have been kept classified by the Israeli army. The radio said the investigation, conducted by the state comptroller, found that Barak did not leave the scene of the accident prematurely before all of the wounded had received medical attention.

King, Prince Felipe hold talks on peace process, Jordan-Spain ties

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Tuesday received at Army Headquarters Spain's Crown Prince Felipe for talks on the Middle East peace process and issues of concern to Jordan and Spain.

During the meeting, which was attended by Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabariti and a Spanish delegation, Prince Felipe conveyed good wishes to King Abdullah from King Juan Carlos.

Also Tuesday, Prince Felipe visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for discussions with Foreign Minister Abdul Iah Khatib on bilateral ties. The Spanish prince stressed that Spain attaches great importance to Jordan's role in the region and reaffirmed continued Spanish and European support for the Kingdom.

Khatib outlined the latest developments in the Middle East peace process, emphasising Jordan's interest in promoting peace and stability in the region. He also voiced Jordan's appreciation for the assistance provided by Spain and the EU to the Kingdom.

Earlier, Prince Felipe, who



His Majesty King Abdullah holds talks Tuesday with Spain's Crown Prince Felipe at Army Headquarters in Amman. Prince Felipe is in Amman on a three-day official visit (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

is on a three-day visit to Jordan, met with Lower House of Parliament Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali and Senate President Zeid Rifai.

Prince Felipe was briefed on the country's parlia-

tary life, and parliamentarians expressed Jordan's appreciation of Spain's support for Jordan.

Prince Felipe also visited the archaeological site at the Amman Citadel and was

briefed by Tourism Minister Akel Biltaji on its historical background. The minister pointed out that a Spanish archaeological team is working on the restoration of the site,

King meets with U.S. peace group, chief of Arab American association

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Tuesday said development and prosperity for the people of the Middle East can only be achieved in an atmosphere of peace and stability.

The peace process is a long and arduous trek but it is an inevitable development to help the people of the region overcome the feelings of fear and anxiety and enjoy security and stability, King Abdullah said at a meeting with a visiting group representing the Peace Now Movement in the U.S.

In reviewing the peace process, King Abdullah referred to the obstacles in its path but he stressed that Jordan is seeking a just and durable peace between peoples rather than between governments.

The King said that in this respect there is a chance for resuming peace negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, noting that peace between Syria and Israel is as important as peace between Israel on the one hand and Egypt, Jordan and

Palestine on the other.

King Abdullah expressed his belief that Syria aspires to a comprehensive peace like the other peoples of the region and underlined the need for Israel and Lebanon to exercise restraint, avoid escalation of tension and work to attain peace along the common border.

Referring to the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, King Abdullah emphasised the need for overcoming obstacles on that front, reaffirming Jordan's stand in support of the Palestinian people's right to an independent state on their national soil.

The King also expressed hope that all obstacles hindering Jordanian-Palestinian trade would be removed and that open trade will be conducted between Jordan and Israel.

The visiting delegation paid tribute to the late King Hussein's endeavours towards restoring stability and creating the appropriate climate for investment projects.

Also Tuesday, King Abdullah met with Khalil Jahan, president of the

National Association of Arab Americans. The King paid tribute to their role in the U.S. in defending Arab rights and called for Arab Americans to maintain strong links with the Arab Nation.

King meets with French Jewish delegation

King Abdullah also met at Army headquarters with a group representing Jewish organisations in France and outlined Jordan's policies on the peace process, which he said are an extension of the policies of King Hussein.

King Abdullah reaffirmed Jordan's determination to support the Palestinian people in their struggle to regain their legitimate rights.

The delegation praised Jordan's peace moves, paying tribute to King Hussein's endeavours towards restoring stability and creating the appropriate climate for investment projects.

Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabariti attended the meetings.

Iran president begins landmark visit to Italy

ROME (R) — Iranian President Mohammad Khatami received a warm welcome on Tuesday at the start of a three-day state visit to Italy and the Vatican seen as opening a new epoch in relations between the Islamic state and the West.

"The Islamic Republic, having reached maturity, is more prepared to expand such relations. With goodwill, we can have better ties," Khatami said in Tehran before leaving for the first state visit by an Iranian president to Western Europe since the fall of the shah in 1979.

Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro greeted Khatami amid colourful state pageantry at the Quirinal presidential palace, where the Iranian president inspected a guard of honour.

Asked why he believed the trip to Italy was important, Khatami, speaking through an interpreter, told reporters amid a crush of TV cameras in the Quirinale: "As you know, each visit has a means of friendship which is very important for our country."

Italy is rolling out the red carpet for the reformist Shiite cleric, who, while Italian ministers believe has set Iran on a course of modernisation and has shown the best signs of Tehran wanting to open up to the West

since the overthrow of the Shah.

But Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema and Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini, who held talks with U.S. President Bill Clinton last week, have pledged to stress their reservations over Iran's human rights record and urge Khatami to back non-proliferation.

Despite opposition to the visit from around a third of Italy's parliamentarians, leaders of the centre-left government have underlined what they said was the need now to show clear support for Khatami and his reformists, up against conservatives and traditionalist clergy who still wield clout in Iran.

"He faces opposition from the more conservative members of Islamic society but he has the support, as shown by the recent elections of the young, women and the Iranian people in general," Dini told Italian television.

He said the United States was watching the visit "with great interest".

While Washington has slightly softened its line towards Iran, it still accuses the country of supporting terrorism and seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

The United States has

accused Russian firms of helping Iran develop nuclear and missile programmes and has imposed sanctions on 10 Russian companies and research institutes.

Trade, in particular in the oil and gas sector, was likely to be central in talks between the two nations. A source close to Italian energy company ENI said contacts between ENI officials and members of the Iranian delegation were likely.

"It is conceivable there will

be contacts between members of President Khatami's delegation and ENI officials," the source said. "He is accompanied by a host of other individuals who have a specific interest in what ENI could do in Iran," he said.

ENI and French oil company Elf-Aquitaine signed a \$1 billion deal last week with the national Iranian oil company to develop the offshore Doroud oilfield.

While Khatami and his

entourage were being feted at the presidential palace, less than a kilometre away near the ruins of ancient Rome, thousands of Iranian opposition activists and their supporters protested against the visit.

Iranians opposed to Khatami say little has changed since he won power 21 months ago, alleging that more than 300 people have been publicly executed, nine people stoned to death and 28 dissidents assassinated abroad.

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Musa expressed total support for Arafat's stand.

Arafat, before leaving for the airport, said only that his talks focused on the "modalities which must be taken May 4, the date the interim autonomy phase expires, and on the stance the Palestinian National Authority must take."

"Mr. Arafat is listening to and receiving numerous opinions, messages and analyses about this question, but he believes that the issue of proclaiming a state is an absolutely undebatable question," Musa said.

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Palestinian International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath said here Monday that the PNA was "carefully" considering a request by European states to delay the planned

May 4 declaration of a state. But Shaath added that no decision had been made.

He also said that the two sides were discussing unspecified guarantees in exchange for delaying the proclamation. The United States and the European Union, along with Egypt and Jordan, have all urged Arafat to delay declaring a state at least until after Israel's general elections on May 17.

"We are now busy working to win [international] approval for the proclamation of a state," Musa said.

The Egyptian minister brushed aside U.S. criticism over any "unilateral" declaration of a state. "The proclamation of a state is based on the right to self-determination and the Palestinians have the right to decide their fate."

He recalled that Israel "had effectively approved this state" and that the Labour Party "under the leadership of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had raised it."

"We are telling them [the Israelis]: Negotiate to avoid problems and to ensure a proper and peaceful framework for the proclamation of a state," Musa said.

Qatar calls on U.S. defence secretary to stop air strikes on Iraq

DOHA (AFP) — U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen heard Tuesday on his Gulf tour a blunt call from Qatar to halt the near daily air strikes against Iraq and allow the United Nations to resolve the crisis.

Iraq's official press, meanwhile, said it was high time for Arab leaders to follow France's example and speak out against the U.S.-led strikes.

Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Ben Jassim Ben Jaber Al Thani said at a press conference with Cohen that the Iraq crisis should be solved quickly through the U.N. Security Council.

"We wish not to see Iraq being bombed daily or these attacks that are taken daily in the 'no-fly' zones," Sheikh Hamad said after a meeting with the defence secretary.

"Sometimes we have our differences, I have to tell you very frankly. But in principle, I don't think there is any difference between us and the United States," he added.

It was the first time a Gulf official

turned up for a press conference with Cohen since he began the tour in Bahrain last Friday and went on through Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

The secretary replied: "There would be no daily attacks on triple-A [anti-aircraft artillery] or the radars of the surface-to-air missiles if Saddam Hussein were not trying to take down and destroy... our aircraft."

"So the way for these counter-attacks to stop is for Saddam to simply stop trying to violate the no-fly zones, stop trying to kill our pilots and our aircrews."

But Sheikh Hamad said: "We strongly believe that the problem of Iraq should be solved by the U.N. Security Council and the United States also has to solve this problem through the Security Council."

"It should be solved as soon as possible because it has repercussions throughout the region."

Cohen earlier met the emir, Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifeh Al Thani.

It was the first time a Gulf official

before heading for Kuwait, the last Gulf leg of his Middle East tour and where he was to meet U.S. airmen at Ahmad Al Jaber air base.

U.S. warplanes are deployed at the base, south of Kuwait City, from where they patrol an exclusion zone over southern Iraq.

Despite the differences aired at the press conference, Doha and Washington agreed to open secure telephone links between their defence ministries, and Cohen, as he has on earlier stops, offered to share early-warning intelligence data on missile launches in Iraq or Iran.

In Baghdad, the official daily Al Qudsia praised French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine for his three-nation Gulf tour during which he called for a political settlement of the Iraq crisis.

Vedrine, who wound up his tour in Kuwait on Sunday, criticised the low-level air war which has been going on since December.

Regional leaders "who have for-

gotten their Arab allegiance should at least follow the example of foreign countries such as Russia, China and France," Al Jumhuriya said.

It focused its criticism on Saudi Arabia, whose Defence Minister Prince Sultan Ben Abdul Aziz said after talks with Cohen that the U.S. air strikes were "their business."

Discussions were expected to focus on bilateral and regional issues, namely the situation in Iraq.

Jordan is the seventh leg of Cohen's nine-nation Gulf and Middle East tour, which has already taken him to Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

His tour, which diplomats said was meant to rally support for continuous U.S. and British air strikes on Iraq, came under attack in the Gulf press, which also charged Cohen with trying to drum up support for a plan to overthrow the regime of President Saddam Hussein.

King Abdullah has repeatedly voiced Jordan's determination not to

allow any party to use its territory as a "springboard" for interference in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries.

A U.S. embassy source also on Tuesday confirmed that U.S. Assistant Secretary for the Middle East Martin Indyk is expected in Amman on Saturday, as part of a regional tour also including Turkey and Syria.

At a press conference in Washington on Monday, State Department spokesman James Rubin said Indyk's trip will primarily be linked to the Iraq issue.

Rubin said Indyk will also discuss with Syrian authorities negotiations between Israel and Syria, which have been stalled for three years.

However, international news agencies quoted Rubin as saying: "I think it is not realistic to resume negotiations on the Syrian track before the Israeli elections," scheduled for May 17.

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Ethiopia accused of invading Somalia

MOGADISHU (AFP) — An armoured column of Ethiopian troops made a two-day incursion over the border into Somalia, looting field radios and other equipment and kidnapping a businessman, a Somali warlord charged Tuesday.

The warlord, Somali National Front (SNF) leader General Omer Haji Mohammad "Masale," said the troops rolled over the border in the Balanbare area of Somalia's central Galguduud region on Sunday, withdrawing on Monday. His charge could not immediately be confirmed by independent sources, but Ethiopian troops crossed the border several times last year in hot pursuit of rebels.

Factions in Somalia — without a central government for the past eight years — are divided into pro- and anti-

Ethiopian groups.

Ethiopia, fighting a border war in the north with Eritrea, is simultaneously faced with a low-level rebellion by ethnic Somalis. Oromos, and an Islamic group, Al Itihad Al Islam.

Pro-Ethiopian factions charged last month that Eritrea was arming Ethiopian rebels through Mogadishu warlord Hussein Mohammed Aideed, flying weapons into the Baladde airstrip, 90 kilometres west of the Somali capital. "The invading Ethiopian forces looted valuables including radio communication equipment on Monday," Masale said.

He urged people in the Galguduud and neighbouring Gedo regions to establish civil defence units to combat Ethiopian "occupation."

"It is the time to forget domestic differences and fight the outside enemy. Ethiopia is dreaming of annexing part of Somalia," Masale charged.

He said the motorised battalion (300 to 500 men), with tanks and armoured personnel carriers entered Baladde town from Ethiopia's eastern Ogaden region and ordered people to remain in their houses, then undertook a looting spree, detaining a number of people. "They took away Mohammad Fayoge, a well known businessman," he said.

Masale said he had contacted "reasonable" faction leaders to urge them to engage in a joint defence of the region.

Elders in Mogadishu meanwhile told AFP that hundreds of fighters had deserted Aideed's militia, taking with them 10 armed pick-up trucks and two long-range artillery pieces.

Witnesses said the deserters had set up a camp in the Murusade stronghold of Deynile, west of Mogadishu.

Observers here said the desertion was a major political and military embarrassment to Aideed as the Murusade were the single largest non-Habir Gedir group supporting him in the divided capital.

He urged people in the Galguduud and neighbouring Gedo regions to establish civil defence units to combat Ethiopian "occupation."

HAMBURG (AFP) — Kurdish rebels will pursue their armed battle for an independent homeland, the brother of detained rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan said in an interview to be published Thursday.

"We are forced to settle this by war," said Osman Ocalan in the interview with the weekly magazine Stern. "The Turkish government wants the PKK to be wiped out." His interview confirmed previous

statements by Abdullah Ocalan's Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) that called for "intensifying its war" against Turkey after the PKK leader was captured and hauled to Turkey to face trial for treason.

Osman Ocalan, 43, said political dialogue with Ankara was only possible if the rebel leader was freed and recognised as representative of the Kurdish people.

Striking a deliberately

aggressive note, he warned of popular uprisings in Turkish cities and kamikaze attacks against Turkish troops.

"We will be a fireball attacking the enemy," he said.

Osman Ocalan said European cities outside Turkey or tourists would not be targeted.

"We do not plan to devastate consulates and party offices," he said. "There will be no violence in Europe. Our followers must abide by the laws of the country they live in."

In many European cities Kurdish protests turned violent after Ocalan was arrested in Kenya last month. Four Kurds died when they attacked the Israeli consulate in Berlin.

Osman Ocalan, who lives in the northern Iraqi mountains near the Turkish border, would not rule out that Cemil Bayik, one of the PKK's founding fathers and commanders, could take Ocalan's place as party leader.

Ocalan brother warns of 'war'

By Nayla Razzouk

MARJAYOUN (AFP) — Fatima's heart skipped a beat when she heard Israeli troops may be pulling out of southern Lebanon.

But her joy quickly turned to apprehension when she recalled that the few years she had been forced to work for the Israeli-run civil administration in the occupied zone had branded her as a "traitor" to her country.

"We were all ecstatic about the idea of reuniting with our family members who took a one-way ticket out of the zone," said Fatima, who like many Lebanese interviewed in the border strip requested that only her first name be used.

"But we are scared that the Lebanese authorities and resistance groups will get back at us," she added.

"We spent a lifetime under a harsh occupation that forced us to do these things," said Fatima, 30. "The border zone is nearly sealed off from the outside world and economic conditions are very poor."

Residents of the border zone have been tormented by mixed feelings amid the first signs from Israel that the Jewish state is serious about bringing an end to its 21 years of occu-

pation of southern Lebanon.

Following the deaths of six soldiers, including a brigadier general, in five days, opposition Labour Party candidate for Prime Minister Ehud Barak said he would bring Israeli forces home by next year if elected in May elections.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also indicated for the first time that he may be ready to carry out a unilateral withdrawal from the "security zone" set up by Israel to prevent attacks on its northern settlements. Many Lebanese, however, are sceptical about an Israeli pullout.

"The Israelis have been saying that they want to withdraw for years. Why should we believe them now?" said Mona Saeed, a Shiite Muslim pharmacist.

"It has become clear to everyone that the resistance's recent successes are a defeat to Israel on the ground, but these pullout proposals may be mere election gimmicks before the polls," she added.

About 90,000 Lebanese — 50 per cent less than estimates five years ago — struggle to survive in the uncertain atmosphere of the "security zone," the last open front-line of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The population continues to shrink due to dangerous living conditions and a high rate of unemployment which forces 3,000 residents to cross into "enemy territory" in northern Israel for work every day.

"We live in continuous distress and guilt trips whichever way we turn," said a schoolteacher. "We are torn between Lebanese authorities, Israeli forces, SLA militiamen, resistance groups and a whole network of informers and intelligence services with pledged allegiance to whomsoever wants to use them," he said.

The Shiite Hezbollah movement, which spearheads the guerrilla war to oust Israel from southern Lebanon, has been lobbying for passing a law offering a three-month grace period to "repent and cease collaborating with the enemy."

"At the end of the day, Lahad and his top aides will either be granted asylum in a foreign country or will move to Israel, where many SLA officers already have homes," said a Christian owner of a coffee house.

"But what about the rest of us? We have sacrificed our lives because we refused to leave our land, even if we were forced to deal with the enemy to survive. We should be praised, not punished," he said.

"We have no cause to be fighting for anymore. We have become a mere human shield, targeted by our own people from the resistance. We are

wanted by Lebanese authorities and we are dead scared of the Israelis," he said.

Israel continues to insist Lebanese authorities should offer future guarantees for the 2,500 SLA members and their families believed to number about 20,000 people in all.

Last year, 35 militiamen were killed by resistance guerrillas and hundreds of SLA members and "collaborators" are either wanted or sentenced to death or prison terms in absentia by the Beirut military court.

A growing number of SLA militiamen are fleeing the enclave and their commander, General Antoine Lahad, whose wife and children live in France, has been condemned in absentia to death for treason.

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"We have no cause to be fighting for anymore. We have become a mere human shield, targeted by our own people from the resistance. We are

wanted by Lebanese authorities and we are dead scared of the Israelis," he said.

Israel continues to insist Lebanese authorities should offer future guarantees for the 2,500 SLA members and their families believed to number about 20,000 people in all.

Last year, 35 militiamen were killed by resistance guerrillas and hundreds of SLA members and "collaborators" are either wanted or sentenced to death or prison terms in absentia by the Beirut military court.

A growing number of SLA militiamen are fleeing the enclave and their commander, General Antoine Lahad, whose wife and children live in France, has been condemned in absentia to death for treason.

"At the end of the day, Lahad and his top aides will either be granted asylum in a foreign country or will move to Israel, where many SLA officers already have homes," said a Christian owner of a coffee house.

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Briefs

Bahraini emir receives Prince Hassan

MANAMA (Petra) — Bahraini Emir Sheikh Hamad Ben Isa Al Khalifah received Monday HRH Prince Hassan, who offered his condolences on the passing away of Sheikh Isa Ben Salman Al Khalifah. Sheikh Hamad expressed appreciation for Prince Hassan's kind gesture. The Prince was accompanied Monday by former prime minister Abdul Salam Majali, Sharif Jamil Ben Nasser and former information minister Nasser Judeh. Sheikh Salman Ben Hamad Al Khalifah and several ministers and senior officials received the Jordanian delegation at the airport.

Prince Ali meets UAE minister

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Prince Ali, president of the Jordan Football Association, Tuesday received the United Arab Emirates Minister of Information and Culture Sheikh Abdullah Ben Zayed Al Nahayan at the Royal Court. They discussed scopes of bilateral cooperation in the sports and youth fields. Sheikh Abdullah heads the UAE Football Federation.

Premier inspects water ministry

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh Tuesday said water issues top the government's agenda and called for unifying efforts to provide water to all citizens and to secure new resources. During an inspection of the Ministry of Water and Irrigation yesterday, Rawabdeh stressed the importance of collecting accurate information in assessing the current water situation. In presenting a briefing to the premier on ministry operations, Minister Kamel Mahadin said an emergency plan would be formulated if necessary to find solutions to any problems in the water sector.

Royal Court appointments

AMMAN (Petra) — Two Royal Decrees were issued Tuesday appointing Samir Zeid Rifai as Secretary General of the Royal Court and Ibrahim Ra'd al-Saoud Nabilis as Director of the Chief of the Royal Court's office.

World Bank delegation visits Rafaa'

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Social and Administrative Development Faisal Rafaa' Tuesday reviewed with Chief Chamberlain HRH Prince Ra'd Ben Zeid the ministry's plans to address social imbalances. Prince Ra'd called at the ministry to congratulate Rafaa' on his appointment and stressed the need for special care of the handicapped and for focusing on community-based rehabilitation. In another meeting with a World Bank delegation, Rafaa' reviewed the ministry's programmes to improve the lives of Jordanians. The delegation stressed their support for the ministry's drive to implement the social safety net through fighting poverty and unemployment.

SSC reaps JD76.4m in 1998 profits

AMMAN (Petra) — Labour Minister Eid Fayez Tuesday chaired an SSC Board of Directors meeting and was briefed on its activities by Director General Sawsan Touqan. Touqan said 240,000 labourers and employees working in 12,600 companies and institutions are covered by the SSC law. He said the SSC spends more than JD4 million monthly to pay salaries to retirees. Touqan pointed out that SSC investments have exceeded JD1.1 billion and that profits on these investments in 1998 totalled JD76.5 million.

WHAT'S GOING ON

LECTURE

"Beethoven Symphonie Nr. 2 D-Dur" by von Helmut Burkard (in English) at the National Music Conservatory at 6:00 p.m.

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

Jordan Television Channel Two special interview with economist Dr Taher Kanaan at 8:30 p.m. This programme is part of a special interview series, hosted by Rami Khouri, examining the lessons learned from the life and reign of King Hussein, Jordan's political, economic and social situation and how the legacy of King Hussein is relevant to the country's national challenges at the beginning of the reign of His Majesty King Abdullah. The interviews will be broadcast every Monday and Wednesday at 8:30 p.m. on Channel 2. All interviews are in English with Arabic subtitles.

Correction

The headline "Minor in custody for stabbing death of sister" (JT, p. 3, March 9, 1999) should have read, "Minor in custody for shooting death of sister." The Jordan Times regrets the error and apologises for any inconvenience this may have caused our readers.

Hospital beds are not equally distributed in Jordan, with the bulk found in Amman — a consequence of unplanned investment, a lack of feasibility studies and general mismanagement of the sector

— Mahmoud Taher

Jordan's private hospitals find stiff competition in a limited market

By Suha Ma'ayeh

AMMAN — Jordan's private hospitals are scrambling to lure patients to fill most of their beds, left empty due to an oversupply of beds, resulting from rash decisions to build private medical institutes over the last 10 years.

Physicians said lack of a clear and coordinated policy between Jordan's 74 private and public hospitals has resulted in costly hospitals offering similar services.

Three more hospitals are under construction.

"Some hospitals are in debt partly because investment was based on banking loans, while others face financial problems because they are equipped with the latest technology which harmed their budget," said Fareed Massarweh, Hospital Administrator at the Amman Surgical Hospital, a multi-million dollar enterprise owned by a group of private doctors.

"There is severe competition among the country's hospitals, especially since most have developed and upgraded their facilities," he told the Jordan Times.

"In some hospitals, revenues are not enough to cover their opera-

tional cost," he added.

Deep economic recession brought to Jordan in the wake of the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis and alleged abuse by some "unscrupulous" physicians of non-Jordanian patients who flock to the country from neighbouring Arab Gulf states and impoverished Yemen, have also dealt a heavy blow to the credibility of many medical facilities, doctors added.

The state subsidised, army-run Royal Medical Services (RMS) which treats nearly 1.6 million military personnel and their families under a health insurance scheme introduced in 1963, is also emerging as a main competitor to private sector hospitals.

The RMS also treats employees working in large firms, such as the Royal Jordanian, which choose to send their employees to the RMS instead of private sector medical facilities, according to Mahmoud Taher, chairman of the Private Hospital Society (PHS).

"The RMS waiting list is growing and is overloaded with patients who should have been treated in private sector hospitals," he told the Jordan Times.

Jordan's 52 private hospitals, most of which sprouted up in the

late 1980 and 1990s, offer treatment as varied as neurosurgery, cardiac care and scopic surgery to micro-insemination, and all variety of plastic surgery, performed by foreign-trained doctors.

But in a country where the annual per capita income of a Jordanian is JD 1,400, health officials estimate that only one million of the Kingdom's 4.6 million people can afford treatment at private hospitals.

"Private hospitals boast 3,000 beds, a relatively high figure given the fact that the number of patients is limited," he said.

Taher said hospital beds are not

equally distributed across Jordan, with the bulk found in Amman — a consequence of unplanned investment, a lack of feasibility studies and general mismanagement of the sector.

"The high number of beds is creating unhealthy competition and this will negatively impact medical care standards," he stressed.

According to a 1997-1998 World Bank study on Jordan's health sector, the Kingdom spends about eight per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on health care.

"This amount is well in excess of

most middle-income and even

some Western industrialised countries," it said.

The study highlighted that "while

the health system performs relatively well in terms of overall access

and outcomes, it is expensive and

inefficient, and there are geographic

maldistributions of resources."

The rapid growth in the private

sector suggests dissatisfaction with the services provided through the public sector and is leading towards a two-tiered system of care, accord-

ing to the study.

"Those who can afford to pay go to the private sector while those

who cannot are relegated to the pub-

lic health facilities."

Nearly 1.2 million civil servants

and their families benefit from a

health insurance scheme introduced in 1965 by the Ministry of Health and are treated at its 22 hospitals and at its nearly 1,000 outpatient departments.

Others who seek treatment in the

public sector but are not covered by

the scheme have to pay nominal fees — covering up to 15 per cent of

the actual cost of treatment.

Successive governments have

mulled over the idea of introducing

a national health insurance scheme

that would present more than one

"Cooperation among all medical institutions will help market health care services to neighbouring countries, achieve cooperation between medical institutions and boost the occupancy rate," Barghouti added.

"All doctors will benefit."

Doctors say some 15 per cent of

patients being treated at private hospitals are Arabs of other nationalities — mainly from Yemen, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Libya, Iraq, Algeria and Saudi Arabia.

"Up to three per cent of non-Jordanian patients who come to Jordan for treatment on an individual basis are often financially abused," said Barghouti.

"This has affected the reputation of private hospitals. Now these patients prefer to go to Germany and Lebanon for treatment."

However, he added, "if we improve our ethics with non-Jordanians, and decrease medical abuse, the number of patients will increase," he stressed.

The Jordan Medical Association has to play an active role in changing professional rules to organise medical practice and to deal with the problems in the private sector, he said.



PM urges joint efforts to stave off recession

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh on Tuesday urged private sector representatives to join forces with the government to find solutions to Jordan's economic recession.

Rawabdeh, who spoke at separate meetings with both the chambers of commerce and industry and the Jordan Businessmen's Association, said his newly-appointed government is ready to launch a dialogue with the private sector to improve the performance of the economy.

"A joint dialogue will enable us to find solutions that will serve the interests of the country and its citizens," the prime minister told Amman Chamber of Commerce council members in his first meeting with private sector representatives.

In his letter of designation to the 60-year-old premier, His Majesty King Abdullah urged the 22-member Cabinet to work to bring the recession to an end and find solutions to eradicate poverty and unemployment. He also instructed them to find ways to attract more investments to the Kingdom.

Government figures indicate that one in every five Jordanian lives below the poverty line. Unemployment stands officially at 16 per cent and unofficially at 27 per cent.

Recent statistics have indicated that economic growth

rates in the past two years have fallen far below the expectations forecast by the economic restructuring programme that Jordan signed with the Bretton Woods institutions.

During his meetings yesterday, Rawabdeh noted that most government spending was channelled to limited income groups in the society. He added that any decline in public revenues will negatively affect this socio-economic stratum of

Amman and Baghdad due to the decline in world oil prices, bringing the \$235 million protocol to \$200 million.

During his meetings yesterday, Rawabdeh, private sector representatives urged the government to pressure the Israeli government to ease trade barriers blocking the flow of Jordanian goods to the Palestinian markets.

They also asked the government to protect national industries from what they describe as an influx of foreign goods to the Kingdom "which endanger national industries."

Businessmen also said trade agreements with some Arab states, especially Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, should be activated. Trade agreements with these states include mutual tax exemption clauses.

They said the business community supports the government's privatisation plans, but believes privatisation should be carried out within a "well-defined framework" that gives priority to Jordanian and Arab investors.

They also urged Rawabdeh to reconsider a plan put forth by the previous government to introduce a two-day weekend.

Rawabdeh told members of the Amman Chamber of Industry that the two-day weekend "was not one of the priorities of his government." He did not elaborate.

NES students protest tuition hike

By Dana Charkasi

AMMAN — High school students at Amman's New English School (NES) yesterday tried to continue their fourth day of strike in protest of what they and their parents say are steep tuition increases set by the school for the next scholastic year.

For A-level students the tuition fees will be increased by around 17 per cent.

"Our parents do not lay golden eggs" was the message children wrote on cardboard placards presented to the school's management.

"We know that a school is not a charitable society, but fees have to be reasonable," said a father who refused to be named for fear that his child might suffer mistreatment by the school's management.

"We have been promised all improvements [in these things] for a long time, but nothing is happening," a parent told the Jordan Times.

Witnesses claim that in the Senior School English Department, only about two out of 12 teachers are native English speakers. In the secondary school 10-12 out of more than 100 teachers are foreign.

"A number of teachers can't speak proper English," complained a female student.

Some teachers sympathised with the students' requirements but were afraid to support them, saying they feared losing their

jobs.

"I have one student in the 10th grade whose parents are not exactly well-off. The parents pay JD2,000 now for their child's middle school education. Next year he'll enter the A-level and the parents will have to pay JD3,500 instead of the JD3,000 parents currently pay for the A-level," the teacher said.

"They say they are trying to improve the quality of the staff by hiring experts who are expensive and therefore they need more money. Last year, five expatriates left and they replaced them with only one expatriate," the teacher added.

One female student charged that school textbooks — which are expensive in addition to tuition — are often not originals, but photocopies.

"I would change school if I could. But the problem is that the A-level consists of a two-year course. Since I've started it, it would be difficult to quit and restart somewhere else," said the student.

"My children have been living abroad most of their lives, they don't know Arabic very well. There are only a few schools that offer the A-level, that's why I can't let them change schools," said one mother.

Health care services to neighbouring countries, achieve cooperation between medical institutions and boost the occupancy rate," Barghouti added.

"All doctors will benefit."

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patients being treated at private hospitals are Arabs of other nationalities — mainly from Yemen, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Libya, Iraq, Algeria and Saudi Arabia.

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The Jordan Medical Association has to play an active role in changing professional rules to organise medical practice and to deal with the problems in the private sector, he said.

Former French PM acquitted in blood scandal

PARIS (AP) — Former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius and another minister were acquitted Tuesday in France's highly charged tainted blood scandal, but a third minister was convicted for his role in the HIV contamination.

In what was clearly a compromise verdict, former Health Minister Edmond Herve was given no penalty despite his conviction.

Judge Christian le Guehenec said that due to the length of the scandal, Herve had not benefited from the "presumption of innocence to which he is entitled."

The court of justice of the republic acquitted Herve's superior, Social Affairs Minister Georgina Dufoix, along with Fabius, for her role in the contamination of seven people who were transfused with HIV-tainted blood in 1985.

The ruling by the specially constituted court came in a painful, protracted case infused with both cold politics and raw emotion.

For the defendants, the trial was a chance to finally clear their names. Their accusers saw it as a long-overdue moment of reckoning for ministers who, they say, badly abused the people's faith.

It was a scandal that shook France's health system to the core: about 4,000 people contracted the AIDS virus from transfusions in the mid-1980s. Hundreds later died.

During 10 days of debate, the court, made up of three judges and 12 legislators, was asked to untangle a complex file detailing the state of medical knowledge about AIDS in the mid-1980s, and what France was doing to fight the disease.

The court was the first since World War II to try ministers for crimes allegedly committed in office.

Fabius, Herve and Dufoix were charged in connection with the AIDS deaths of five people and the contamination of two others during a key period in 1985.

Herve, the lowest-ranked of the defendants, was accused by an investigating commission of "strangely apathetic behaviour," which led to keeping unsterilised blood products in stock after it was known they could be contaminated.

Dufoix and Herve were also accused of a delay in making available imported — and costly — heated blood products, and of negligence in the screening of blood donors.

All three, and Fabius in particular, were accused of a strategy of favouritism that delayed systematic testing for AIDS, waiting for development of a French-made test when an American one was available months earlier.

The defendants stressed they never knowingly approved the use of contaminated blood products, and never put commercial concerns ahead of health.

"Never did financial considerations block important decisions," Herve testified. "The uncertainties were very big at a time when scientific knowledge was besti-

tant."

The most emotional testimony came from the victims.

"You, without doubt, still dream of being president one day, so you wait for this court to acquit you," Sylvie Rouy, 35, told Fabius, who has higher political ambitions.

"I don't want your compassion. I want to know why I was infected," Rouy testified from her wheelchair. She was contaminated during an August 1985 transfusion while giving birth.

State prosecutor Jean-Francois Burgevin called for all charges to be dropped, saying the affair reflected "an immense breakdown of French medicine" and wasn't the fault of politicians.



Combo photo dated Feb. 9, 1999, in Paris shows French former prime minister Laurent Fabius (top), his health and social affairs ministers of the time, Edmond Herve (right) and Georgina Dufoix. The three were tried on manslaughter charges relating to the transfusion of AIDS-tainted blood in the mid-1980s (AFP photo).

N. Ireland leaders in fresh talks under new deadline

BELFAST (AP) — David Trimble and Sinn Fein chief Gerry Adams met for new talks Tuesday to try to broker a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland, but appeared no closer to resolving their differences.

They met at Stormont, near Belfast, after being given three weeks to break the impasse over paramilitary disarmament that has stalled the formation of a government.

Monday, Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam gave them until Easter to reach agreement before she begins the process of devolving power to a Belfast administration.

Before his talks with Trimble, the leader of Northern Ireland's Protestant majority, Adams and his chief negotiator Martin McGuinness met Mowlam.

Arriving at Stormont, Adams said it had been a "mistake" for Mowlam not to stick to her original deadline of Wednesday, and accused Unionists of forcing her hand.

"We think it was because David Trimble — and contrary to his protestations — threatened to walk (from the peace process)," Adams said.

The impasse over disarmament pits Trimble, who leads the pro-British rule Ulster Unionists and is the

province's first minister, against Adams, leader of the IRA's political wing.

Trimble insists he will not form an executive with Sinn Fein aboard until the Irish Republican Army (IRA) has at least begun disarming.

Sinn Fein points to the letter of last year's accord, which specifies only that decommissioning has to be completed next year.

The new deadline is emotive, as it was Good Friday last year that leaders of the province's majority Protestant and minority Roman Catholic communities signed a historic peace accord.

Since then, to frustration on all sides, the issue of taking paramilitary weapons out of commission has stalled the formation of an executive.

"What we now need to do is ensure that the new deadline is kept to," Adams warned.

"It is time for everyone to make sure that this process does not collapse, and we can do that by keeping to the agreements which have been made and not threatening to collapse the process."

There was little sign however that Unionists and Sinn Fein were any closer to an agreement despite the new deadline. Both sides blame each other.

Adams said he was heading into his meeting with Trimble "despite the fact

that we think he has been dictating the pace and threatening to collapse the process."

Unionist security spokesman Ken Maginnis said he was not optimistic of an agreement by the new deadline.

"It is going to be as difficult for Sinn Fein to get to grips with reality in a fortnight's time as it is now," he told BBC radio.

"They cannot come into the executive of a Western democracy with guns in their pockets."

Sinn Fein chairman Mitchel McLaughlin retorted that Unionists were trying to renegotiate the terms of the Good Friday agreement.

It was "simply not reality" to insist that Sinn Fein had the "power or the authority" to take the guns from the IRA, he told the same programme.

The Trimble-Adams talks were the second between Unionists and Sinn Fein in a fortnight.

A Unionist spokesman said they would be urging Sinn Fein to honour all its commitments under the accord, including the need to secure a hand-over of IRA weapons.

He said a genuine start to decommissioning by both Catholic Republican and Protestant loyalist groups was "the last piece of the jigsaw."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hong Kong government refuses mainlanders permission to stay

HONG KONG (AFP) — The Hong Kong government Tuesday refused a group of mainland Chinese who have overstayed their visas permission to stay until a test-case hearing can decide their fate. The mainlanders had entered the territory on two-way permits, but refused to return after the Court of Final Appeal in January ruled that mainland children born to Hong Kong residents had right of abode here. A group of more than 400 Chinese staged a two-week protest outside government offices to fight for the right to remain here until their applications for residency could be processed. The government initially said the Chinese would have to return to the mainland and apply through official channels — a process many said could take years. But then in an apparent softening of their stance, immigration authorities said they would examine the individual cases to decide whether to grant them recognition until a high court test case later this month. But a spokesman said Tuesday the overstayers had not been granted the necessary permission without giving details of how many were affected by Tuesday's ruling. "Instead we urge each and every overstayer to return to the mainland voluntarily," a spokesman said. The government said more than 200 overstayers had already left voluntarily since the Court of Final Appeal ruling.

Britain grades books to match reader tastes

LONDON (R) — British readers who want a novel to suit their mood will be able to consult an Internet database scoring books from one to 10 on humour, emotion, sex or violence. British librarians are awarding 1,000 books, from classic literature to modern novels, points on everything from optimism to repellentness to enable readers to broaden their literary taste. The database is the brainchild of the Society of Chief Librarians, who have already given Thomas Hardy's 19-century classic "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" just two points for optimism and humour but seven for violence and 10 for emotion.

Floods on the rise in Hungary

BUDAPEST (AFP) — Almost 900 people have been evacuated from their homes due to heavy floods in northern Hungary, officials said Tuesday. Water from melting snow covered almost 350,000 hectares of land, threatening 200 villages with 7,500 homes. So far, more than 30 homes have collapsed and several roads have been closed. In one town, Tiszavasvari, concerns have been raised that a huge chemical plant would be flooded, local officials say. President Arpad Goencz called for donations Monday to help those evacuated. Hungary was hit by cold weather last month which caused widespread disruption across Europe.

Norway town encourages sex for New Year 2000 baby

OSLO (R) — A Norwegian town is planning to hold an "erotic week" to encourage sex for couples wanting to have the first baby of the new Millennium. The local cinema in Ota will run erotic films, a hotel is offering free rooms for couples on March 30 and a kindergarten will look after children overnight. "We will allow couples to stay free for three hours from midday as part of our erotic week," said Inge Leif Larsen at the Norlandia Hotel. The offer, however, is only for locals who are married or registered as living together. The region around Ota, north of Lillehammer which hosted the 1994 Winter Olympics, wants more children to help slow a drift to the cities. A local business group is offering prizes for the baby born soonest after new year. A local kindergarten will offer to look after children overnight on Saturday, April 10, reckoning that is the key date for anyone wanting a baby on Jan. 1, 2000. "We're sending out a letter to parents today," said Maalfrid Blindheim at the Otrøbråden kindergarten. "We don't know how many will take up the offer."

Bus in Peru plunges down cliff killing 29 people

LIMA (AFP) — A bus plunged down a 300 metre cliff in northern Peru killing 29 people on board and leaving five others seriously injured, police said. The bus was heading from Julian to the port city of Trujillo, 570 kilometres north of here, when it swerved off a mountain road before dawn Monday, local police said. Rescue crews found five critically injured survivors among 29 bodies at the accident site. Huamachuco Police Commissioner David Jamin said. Road accidents throughout Peru have increased over the past few weeks due to the poor state of repair of rural roads and the wetter-than-usual summer.

13 injured in German train collision

ERFURT, Germany (AFP) — Thirteen people were injured Tuesday when two passenger trains collided at Erfurt station, eastern Germany, police said. In the latest in a string of accidents to tarnish the image of the state-run rail company, Deutsche Bahn. The locomotive and four cars were damaged, and one of the casualties was taken to hospital, they said. The cause of the accident was not immediately known. Deutsche Bahn has suffered more than half a dozen other accidents since the start of the year. In the worst incident, two people died and 34 others were injured.

Philippine nun meted suspended jail sentence for child abuse

MANILA (AFP) — A Roman Catholic nun was given a suspended jail sentence Tuesday after admitting she kicked an 11-year-old student and banged his head on a chair last year, court officials said. Sister Margarita Yamyamin was sentenced to between three and five years in jail but will not be imprisoned under a plea-bargaining agreement in which she will apply for probation. She must report to the court once a month, the judge said. Luis Inton, a pupil at a church-run school in suburban Manila, said the nun held him by the shirt collar, merited his head on a chair in July last year as a form of punishment. The child was forced to transfer to a government-run school because of fear of the nun. His parents charged but later entered a guilty plea. She declined to say she's a nun, "said the boy's mother, Violy Inton. "But my son is my son so I had to pursue the charges." Nun's nation.

World

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Police arrest Basque militant, 5 others, during Aznar visit

PARIS (AP) — Police Tuesday arrested the head of the military wing of the Basque separatist group ETA, on the same day Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar was visiting the French capital.

Police nabbed Javier Arizcuren-Ruiz, also known as "Kantauri," as he left a hotel in east Paris. In total, six alleged ETA members were arrested in two separate raids.

Kantauri, being investigated for an alleged role in 18 killings during ETA's armed struggle, is accused of ordering the failed 1995 assassination of Spain's King Juan Carlos.

Three others were arrested alongside Kantauri. Another two were arrested after leaving an apartment in southwest Paris, which is suspected of being a logistics centre for the ETA movement in Paris.

All six had been under close surveillance this week

and were armed, police said. Spain said it would seek the extradition of at least four of them, including Kantauri.

ETA — the initials in the Basque language for Basque Homeland and Freedom — has killed nearly 800 people during its 31-year campaign for independence.

The group has been observing a truce since Sept. 18, and there has been speculation it will announce a definitive ceasefire later this year.

Since the truce, Aznar has said he is willing to hold peace talks with ETA, but has refused to consider discussing its demand of secession from Spain.

One of the other five arrested was Iantzul Gallastegui Sodupe, accused of participating in the killings of Basque politicians Fernando Mugica and Miguel Angel Blanco.

The other four were identified as Jesus Maria Puy Lecumberri, Mikel

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German parties closer to accord on new citizenship law

BONN (AP) — Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's governing coalition and an opposition party have agreed on the outline of a bill modernising German citizenship rules, a key lawmaker said Tuesday.

Schroeder was forced to backtrack on the reform plan and seek a legislative compromise after a state election defeat cost his centre-left government its majority in the upper house of parliament, where the states are represented.

The government had wanted to make dual citizenship the rule rather than the exception in a bid to integrate more of Germany's 7.3 million foreigners, about a quarter of them Turks.

But rightist foes have collected more than 3 million signatures against dual citizenship.

nationality are controversial.

Rainer Bruederle, a lawmaker for the centre-right Free Democrats negotiating with Schroeder's camp, said Tuesday both sides had agreed the new draft should allow dual nationality for the children at birth but require them to choose as young adults.

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Two Tibetan Buddhist monks chat at the entrance of a temple hall in Beijing's Lantau Temple, the most renowned Tibetan Buddhist temple within China and the residence of a large numbers of monks from Mongolia and Tibet. China has stepped-up its propaganda machine in the days leading up to March 10's 40th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule which ended in bloodshed and exile of the Dalai Lama (AFP photo)

China hits out at Dalai Lama on anniversary eve

BEIJING (R) — On the eve of the 40th anniversary of an anti-Chinese uprising in Tibet, Beijing underlined its contempt for the exiled Tibetan Dalai Lama Tuesday and insisted he was insincere about dialogue.

Top Tibet official Raidi lashed out at the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize winner as a "splitter" and a "loyal tool used by anti-China forces."

"The Dalai Lama is not willing to negotiate. He is afraid to negotiate," Raiti told a news conference during a meeting of the National People's Congress, or parliament, in Beijing.

President Jiang Zemin surprised Beijing's critics in June last year during a visit to China by U.S. President Bill Clinton by offering talks with the Dalai Lama, but only on condition that he recognise Tibet and Taiwan as parts of China.

Since then, the Dalai Lama has said that behind-the-scenes attempts to open channels of communication with Beijing have broken down.

The Dalai Lama speaks of autonomy, not independence, for the Himalayan region.

Wednesday marks the 40th anniversary of an armed separatist uprising in Tibet during which thousands of Tibetans died battling Communist Chinese troops.

The Dalai Lama and most of his ministers fled during the fighting on March 17 and established a "government-in-exile" in India.

In the run-up to the anniversary, China has intensified a propaganda campaign to emphasise improved living conditions for Tibet's 2.5 million people under Chinese Communist rule.

The aim is to contrast life in modern Tibet — with high-

ways, electricity, schools and consumer goods — with backwardness, slavery and feudalism under the Dalai Lama's rule.

Raidi said the Dalai Lama "has not done a single good thing for the Tibetan people."

"He is the chief representative of a feudal-servile system.

Under his rule, the people were reduced to the status of animals," Raidi said.

"The Dalai Lama is changeable. Sometimes he says he is willing to negotiate, sometimes he says he is not willing," Raidi said. "He has two faces."

Critics of China's rule over Tibet say Beijing has systematically destroyed Tibetan culture and tortured monks and nuns who support the Dalai Lama. They say waves of Chinese immigrants have turned the capital, Lhasa, into

a drab, Chinese-looking city. Chinese statistics paint a different picture, showing life expectancy surging over the past 40 years — to 66 years from 35 years — grain output increasing and 81.3 per cent of school age children attending classes.

This week the official Xinhua news agency described the Dalai Lama as "the major source for social disturbances in Tibet as well as the biggest obstacle to the establishment of the normal order of Tibetan Buddhism."

Monday marked the 10th anniversary of Beijing's imposition of martial law in Lhasa following three days of anti-Chinese riots.

An estimated 50 Tibetans were shot dead by police during the mayhem, and martial law remained in effect for more than a year, until May 1, 1990.

PRIJSTINA, Serbia (R) — European diplomats reacted with apprehension Tuesday to word that U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke was in Belgrade for consultations with Yugoslav leaders on an international peace plan for Kosovo.

"We prefer (U.S. envoy) Chris Hill's consultative style to Holbrooke's solo act," said a European diplomat in Pristina who asked not to be named.

"We do not want to be told after the fact to sign up for something that Holbrooke has negotiated on his own behind closed doors with (Yugoslav President Slobodan) Milosevic."

Holbrooke has been the U.S. State Department's diplomatic weapon of last resort in the Balkans since 1995 when he mediated the Dayton peace accord that ended the Bosnian war.

Holbrooke's deputy in the Dayton effort was Chris Hill, who is now shepherding the Kosovo peace process.

Their styles could not be more different. Where Holbrooke is tough and aggressive, Hill is generally soft-spoken.

And if Hill impresses with his patience, as he did during 17 days of Kosovo peace negotiations at Rambouillet, France last month, it is Holbrooke's phenomenal energy and stamina that seem to carry him across the finish line of negotiations.

Western diplomatic efforts in the Balkans have been a three-ring circus for years, involving the U.S. government, major European governments and organisations, and Russia.

Keeping so many parties abreast of developments in high-pressure negotiations can be a full-time job, and one that does not suit Holbrooke's frontal assault style.

Holbrooke has spent more time with President Milosevic than any senior Western diplomat in recent years and was deployed in Yugoslavia in October when NATO air strikes began.

Defenders say that Holbrooke only gets called in on terminal cases and cannot be expected to save everyone.

"Dick Holbrooke may not be everyone's idea of a nice guy but I am tired of hearing Europeans complain about not being consulted," said an American diplomat in Pristina.

"Holbrooke is at heart a European problem and Europe has found every possible excuse not to deal with it... If NATO had enforced the ceasefire as it was supposed to then maybe the Serbs would be in compliance. That's not Holbrooke's fault."

Hill has adopted a more

participatory approach as was plain in Rambouillet where he had two co-negotiators — a Russian and a European.

Whether that approach will be successful remains to be seen.

The 83-page draft peace accord for Kosovo that resulted has been approved in principle by the ethnic Albanian side, but they have yet to affix their signatures.

Yugoslav and Serb authorities say they are willing to consider autonomy for Kosovo, but not the 28,000 NATO ground troops supposed to deploy here to guarantee implementation.

Both sides have been told to sign the deal and present themselves at a follow-on conference in France on March 15 or face the consequences. In Belgrade's case that could include air strikes against military targets.

Western diplomats speculate that Holbrooke's brief has been drawn narrowly by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

"Only he and Albright know the actual limits of his authority, but I suspect he has been told simply to underscore that there is no deal to be made other than the 83-page deal that was completed at Rambouillet," said one European diplomat.

"Because of his unique personal history with Milosevic Holbrooke is the best person to deliver that message, to tell the Yugoslav president that he, Holbrooke, cannot rescue the situation and that the Serbs must sign."

"If Holbrooke allows himself to get drawn into negotiating at the margins of something that the Contact Group reckons has already been negotiated then he will not be doing himself or the peace process any favours."

'Kosovo conference could be delayed'

LONDON (R) — A senior NATO official said Tuesday that a Kosovo peace conference, due to resume next Monday in Paris, could be delayed by a few days to allow more time for progress.

The official, who asked not to be identified, said international mediators wanted the Paris meeting to be a signing ceremony for an agreement on autonomy for the southern Serbia province, drafted at talks in Rambouillet last month, with a few days of detailed discussion on implementation.

Once the Kosovar Albanians had agreed to sign, the mediators would concentrate on winning Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's acceptance of the full package, including a NATO-led implementation force which he has so far rejected.

If they were making progress, the Paris conference could be postponed for a few days to allow time to complete the negotiations, the NATO official said.

"I think it won't be Monday," he said, adding that it could slip "perhaps up to seven days."

Western officials have so far insisted publicly that both sides must accept the agreement by the March 15 deadline set at the end of 17 days of negotiations in Rambouillet, southwest of Paris.

U.S. Balkan troubleshooter Richard Holbrooke has arrived in try to convince Milosevic to accept a NATO-led peace force or face punitive air strikes by the Western alliance. He is expected to meet the Yugoslav leader Wednesday. NATO Secretary General Javier Solana, addressing a conference in London Tuesday, repeated the threat to use force if necessary.

"Mr. Milosevic, I can tell you, knows very well what may happen to him if he doesn't sign," Solana said.

Cash boost for police guarding Pinochet

He was arrested in London on Oct. 16 at Spain's request as he recovered from back surgery.

An earlier Law Lords panel ruled that he did not have sovereign immunity, but that was overturned because of links between one of the judges and human rights group Amnesty International, which has campaigned for his trial.

If the second panel rules in Pinochet's favour, he will be free to return home to Chile.

If it rules against him, he will remain under police guard while he fights what are certain to be lengthy extradition proceedings. A magistrates' court bearing is scheduled on March 22.

Swiss-English round-the-world balloon crosses India

GENEVA (AP) — The Swiss-British balloonists aiming to be the first to circle the world non-stop crossed India Tuesday, the Geneva control centre said.

By early afternoon Indian time (0900 GMT) Swiss pilot Bertrand Piccard and his British teammate Brian Jones were a few kilometres south of the eastern Indian town of Varanasi, a spokeswoman said.

Their Breitling Orbiter 3 will enter China's air space early Wednesday, the 10th day of its journey, south of 26 degrees latitude, the centre said. That would put it within the zone approved by Beijing.

The centre said the balloon had been picking up speed and altitude. As it neared Bangladesh it was travelling at 96 kilometres an hour, at a height of 7,933 metres.

Over India the crew was out of contact with Geneva for long periods because of the

clouds and satellite communications, said flight director Alan Noble.

"The reason for this might be the huge silver envelope of the balloon, which is shielding the antennas from the Indian Ocean communication satellite," said Noble.

The balloon is expected to enter China in the early hours of Wednesday local time (between 2100 and 0000 GMT Tuesday), the control centre said.

China has set strict limits to Breitling Orbiter's route, and the balloon is on course to cross south of 26 degrees latitude within the permitted area, the control centre said.

The centre said the balloon had been picking up speed and altitude. As it neared Bangladesh it was travelling at 96 kilometres an hour, at a height of 7,933 metres.

Over India the crew was out of contact with Geneva for long periods because of the

Many dying in N. Korean famine, U.N. body says

GENEVA (R) — The United Nations' food relief agency said Tuesday there was a real famine in North Korea and that many people were dying as a new period of trial loomed for the country's 23 million inhabitants.

The World Food Programme (WFP) warned the coming months would be hard because only 10 per cent of rice fields had been worked due to a lack of fuel and spare parts for machinery and because the relatively warm winter had left weeds and parasites active.

"There is certainly a famine in North Korea... certainly many people are dying of illnesses linked to malnutrition," WFP spokeswoman Christiane Berthiaume told a

news briefing.

But she said the agency could not confirm reports from refugees as saying corpses could be seen along highways in different parts of the country.

Berthiaume said WFP staff had recorded growing malnutrition, especially among children over the age of seven attending primary schools where there were no canteens serving lunches.

"These children are given food aid which they take home, but it is probably shared by their whole family," she added. This explained why more older children were going to hospitals suffering from malnutrition.

By the end of March or the beginning of April, she said, the North Korean authorities would have distributed all the

food produced in last autumn's harvest.

"This means the population will move into a difficult period when it will start eating grass, wild mushrooms, tree bark, sea weed and cakes made of grass, all of which calm hunger pangs but have no nutrient value and in fact cause sickness," she said.

The agency was convinced that its aid went to the people who needed it and not to party officials and army officers. "What the WFP sends is wheat and maize. The elite and the military prefer rice, and they have access to that," she said.

Berthiaume said the WFP had received 600,000 tonnes of food supplies from donors for North Korea last year.

which looked good on paper but was not so effective in practice.

This was because deliveries were largely cereals, which were less able to help people suffering from serious malnutrition.

The supplies had not included enough beans, vegetable oil, vegetables, sugar or soya wheat.

The 1998 aid deliveries had a total value of \$210 million against the \$345 million the agency had sought, she added.

For 1999, it was seeking 533.5 million tonnes of food to a value of \$225.6 million. So far, 324.7 million tonnes, worth \$101.3 million, had come in, "but again it is mainly cereals," Berthiaume said.

China banned overflights last December after the balloon of British tycoon Richard Branson, American millionaire Steve Fossett and Per Lindstrand of Sweden drifted north of 26 degrees into the forbidden zone.

British balloonists Colin Prescott and Andy Elson, who had to ditch in the Pacific Sunday, said one reason they ended their record-setting flight was their failure to receive Chinese permission.

That forced them to swing south through the bay of Bengal, Thailand and Vietnam. Elson and Prescott, nonetheless, kept their balloon aloft longer than anyone had done previously — 17 days, 18 hours and 25 minutes.

Piccard and Jones, who took off March 1 from the Swiss Alps, have so far covered 12,868 kilometres, said the control centre.

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Washington Watch

First Lady for the Senate?

SPECULATION THAT First Lady Hillary Clinton may run for a Senate seat in 2000 has dominated political news coverage in recent days.

It is a fascinating story. The Senate seat in New York State is opening because of the retirement of Democrat Daniel Moynihan. Moynihan has served since 1976. Because the Constitution does not require residency in a state prior to running for the Senate, anyone may run for the position. In 1964, for example, Robert F. Kennedy, not a New Yorker, riding on the popularity of the Kennedy legacy, ran and won the New York Senate seat.

Mrs. Clinton can legally run for the post and appears to be seriously considering this option for a number of reasons.

One political analyst speculates that she may want, in effect, to declare her independence and establish herself as a political leader in her own right. Since she is still quite young, she may even choose to run for the presidency at some point.

While Mrs. Clinton is recognised as an outspoken and capable leader, for more than 20 years she has been a supporter of her husband's aspirations. Even during the times when Bill Clinton was Governor of Arkansas, political observers who witnessed Hillary Clinton in action felt that she had proven political skills and ambitions of her own.

She suffered a slight setback during

her husband's first presidential term, with the mishandling of the health care reform programme. But she has clearly recovered and has established herself as one of the United States' most popular and respected political leaders.

Hillary Clinton's charisma is unquestionably one of the Democratic Party's strongest assets. In 1996, she was the party's "secret weapon."

Her frequent visits to New York State were a major factor contributing to the Democratic victory over Republican Senator Al D'Amato.

She has been a prodigious fund-raiser. A recent Democratic Party fund-raising appeal issued in her name raised three times the expected amount. And last week's visit to New York City for a party fund-raiser was an overwhelming success. More than 900 donors filled the ballroom to capacity, while another 300 doors had to be turned away at the door.

Mrs. Clinton is a major star, who many believe deserves to shine on her own.

But before she actually decides to run for an office, there are many issues that she will have to examine.

On the positive side, there is, of course, her popularity both nationally and in New York. She has great name recognition and is a proven campaigner and fund-raiser. Furthermore, she is the right kind of Democrat for New York State. She is a liberal Democrat, who is known for her advocacy of

women and minorities, for education and health care issues and constituencies that are strong in that state.

And there will be many Democrats in New York and nationally who will want Mrs. Clinton to run. Certainly, if Democrats are to have any chance of regaining control of the Senate, they cannot afford to lose the New York seat they currently hold. Polls show Mrs. Clinton to be the strongest possible Democratic candidate who can beat all the possible Republican challengers.

But there are negative factors, as well that must be considered. New York politics can be dirty and rough. The New York press loves a fight between candidates and frequently provokes fights on their own.

The expected Republican challenger for the Senate seat is New York City's popular Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Giuliani has recently dropped a bit in the polls due to the scandalous murder of an African immigrant resulting from excessive use of force by New York police. Giuliani is held responsible for this because he has in the past encouraged the police to "get tough".

But the mayor remains popular and is a strong candidate and is known to be a tough campaigner. Giuliani will be respectful of Mrs. Clinton, as long as she is the First Lady. But if she announced her candidacy, he will, without a doubt, attack her with full force.

Some political observers suggest that Mrs. Clinton should not run because it is too risky for her. She does not need to hold elective office to have a political platform from which to advocate her issues.

As a former First Lady, they say, she will remain a national spokesperson. If, on the other hand, she runs and loses, her legacy would be tarnished and her stature diminished.

John Zogby, a New York state pollster, offers an additional concern. He suggests that the most important issue for the Clintons' is their legacy. He believes that to protect the legacy of the Clinton administration, they need to insure an Al Gore victory in 2000. If Mrs. Clinton runs in 2000 than the Clinton legacy will require both a Gore victory and a victory in New York state — in other words, victory on two fronts instead of only one.

To that concern, some Democrats add another concern. Mrs. Clinton, they note, can be a significant national campaigner for Democrats in 2000.

She can help Al Gore nationally and help campaign for Democratic candidates for House and Senate seats all across the United States. If she were to run for her own seat in New York, she will have to surrender her national role and will, in effect, be competing with Gore for both money and attention.

The issue of Mrs. Clinton's support for a Palestinian state, is in all likelihood an issue that Republicans will attempt to use against her in New

York. However, this will not be a negative factor against her running. Recent polls show that by a two-to-one margin, New Yorkers support a Palestinian state. Most New York Jews also support this notion. In a recent meeting with New York Jewish leaders Mrs. Clinton reaffirmed her personal preference that the Palestinians deserve an independent state. She added, however, her belief that the issue must be resolved by negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. The leaders left the meeting pleased.

In fact, should the First Lady run and be attacked by the right wing for her advocacy of a Palestinian state, it will most probably help to legitimise this issue and spur a public debate. That would be positive for the issue and the country and for Middle East peace.

At this point, Mrs. Clinton has not decided to run. The very fact that she has allowed speculation to develop about a possible candidacy and has fed the discussion by frequent meetings on the subject with New York advisors, has caused many to believe that she will, in the end enter the race. Her candidacy is still not certain. What is certain, however, is that if she does run, the New York Senate race will be an election like no other. It will be the closest watched Senate race in history. The attention given to it will probably rival the 2000 race for the presidency.

Bananas and the New World Order

THERE ARE two very worrying aspects to the so-called banana war between the U.S. and the EU. One is the growing tendency by Washington to engage in unilateral actions to impose its will on others. The other is what seems to be evidence of U.S. policy determined, not by elected representatives, but influential and powerful interest groups.

A phrase that was bandied about almost frivolously a few years ago was the emergence of a New World Order; a global community taking decisions that transcended individual states' interests, and which were decided upon once consensus could be reached. However, continuing unilateral sanctions imposed on countries like Cuba, the enforced no-fly zones over Iraq, and now these latest punitive sanctions on 15 categories of luxury European goods indicate that the U.S., as the world's remaining superpower, does not seem to be willing or able to transcend the old adage that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The adage seems even the more pertinent as the sanctions were imposed less than 24 hours after the Democratic Party received a large donation from Chiquita — one of the world's biggest banana conglomerates, which, with the two other 'big bananas' Dole and Del Monte, now account for more than two-thirds of world production. The suspicion is, as it must be, that for not even huge amounts of money (over recent years Chiquita has donated some \$1 million to the Democratic Party) U.S. policy can be influenced to this end or that.

Washington has lodged three complaints against the EU with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) over EU's preferential treatment of banana producers in the Caribbean, Africa and the Pacific. In each case the WTO found for the U.S., but the EU now believes it has amended its procedures in conformity with WTO regulations. Furthermore, Europe has a moral obligation towards the ex-colonies where it promoted plantations. Three Caribbean islands — St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Dominica — depend on bananas for over half their export earnings. The WTO is due to rule on the case at the end of the month so announcing unilateral sanctions now just seems plainly absurd.

It cannot be right that one country, however powerful, should impose its will time and again on the rest of the world, especially at the whim of unelected, and therefore not publicly accountable, interest groups. If bodies like the U.N. and the WTO are ever to achieve any weight in a so-called New World Order, their authority must not be flouted by anyone. After all, human rights are based on the axiom that people are equal; should not the same apply to nations.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Dustour's Yasser Za'areh said it seems that the U.S. Secretary of Defence William Cohen's trip to the region has been chosen carefully to coincide with a time when Arabs are suffering under worsening conditions, and are ready to take orders. Cohen and his assistants do not hesitate to put words into some people's mouths by announcing their satisfaction with U.S. actions against Iraq, added Za'areh. The French foreign minister's trip was not properly exploited; it should have been a balancing factor to Cohen's visit, said the writer. What is worse with the current Arab situation is that it has come at a time when U.S. policy has been decided to the benefit of the Zionist lobby, which believes it is important to destroy the Iraqi regime as soon as possible, regardless of how claimed Za'areh. The Iraqi opposition talks about a military coup, and it seems that this suits "everybody," he said. The situation thus is "extremely dangerous," and requires an Egyptian-Syrian joint position to compensate for the hesitation of the Gulf states. It is odd, noted Za'areh, that Cohen has been to nine Arab countries and not met any public demonstrations against his trip.

Al Dustour's editorial also commented on the trips of Cohen and the French foreign minister in the region, condemning the first and praising the second. The editorial said Cohen came to the Gulf to "mask" the U.S. plan to divide northern Iraq and establish a Kurdish area, while the French foreign minister came to convince concerned parties to accept his country's approach for a lifting of the sanctions while at the same time keeping a monitoring system. So Arabs face two different Western positions; the first calls for a division of Iraq, while the second sees an end to the sanctions while at the same time keeping the "spirit" of the U.N. resolutions, which aims at preventing Iraq from developing weapons of mass destruction, said the editorial. The French stand reveals how this country feels a responsibility towards international order, while the U.S. "tour of blackmail" was based on the use of military power to change the Iraqi regime against all international norms, said the newspaper. The daily strikes against Iraq is a perfect example of the superpower's stubborn policies aimed at achieving its own interests even if they contradict the world's will, said the editorial.



The 'low-grade' war on Iraq

By George S. Hishmeh

WASHINGTON — When it became time for President Bill Clinton to give what was described as his "State of the Union for Foreign Policy" at a meeting last week in San Francisco, he hardly touched on the nagging question of Iraq.

His one-liner — "We are working to keep Iraq in check so that it does not threaten the rest of the world or its region with weapons of mass destruction" — raised many eyebrows in this capital city.

This was in marked contrast with his pledge on the Middle East where he was more forthcoming and not as ill at ease.

"I intend to use the time I have remaining in this office to push for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, to encourage Israelis and Palestinians to reach a just and final settlement, and to stand by our friends for peace, such as Jordan.

The people of the Middle East can do it, but time is precious and they can't afford to waste any more of it. In their hearts, they know there can be no security or justice for any who live in that small and sacred land until there is security and justice for all who live there. If they do their part, we must do ours."

It now appears that Clinton's seemingly laid-back position is very much in step with the current thinking of U.S. policy-makers and military leaders who are deliberately maintaining a low-grade war against the Iraqi regime.

Moreover, this followed exposure about a "shabby exploitation" by the Clinton administration of the United Nations to conduct a second, secret spying operation on Iraqi military communications.

The revelations came on the heels of American criticism of U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, now at the midway of his tenure at the world body, over his differences with Washington on how to deal with President Saddam Hussein. A recent front-page article in the Washington Post went on to remind the U.N. leader that "the political and financial support of the United States is so important to giving the United Nations relevance in world affairs that the secretary general cannot afford to ignore what is on Washington's agenda" despite his 185-member constituency.

But these scatter-shot developments, if not inconsequential, are now seen as the rationale for what has been described here as the ongoing "low grade war" aimed at salvaging without public debate the administration's "containment" policy to destabilise the Iraqi regime. Pentagon officials are said to be refusing to disclose, as customary, the number of sorties or bombs dropped "to avoid antagonising friendly Arab countries where sympathy for the Iraqi people runs deep, and to minimise questions at home about the operation's efficacy."

This American frustration of how to deal with the Iraqi leader, in the opinion of one former senior U.N. official, is the reason behind "the political and financial support of the United States" to the U.N. secretary general.

Denis Halliday, who resigned last September as U.N. assistant secretary general and humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, believes that all attempts to lift the U.S.-advocated international sanctions regime against Baghdad could be futile unless "we find a way to help decision-makers to find a way that does not mean too gross a loss of face."

The Irish diplomat who ran the oil-for-food programme told an audience last Friday at the

Centre for Policy Analysis on Palestine that there needs to be first "a genuine international arms control system" to limit arms sales to countries of the region. "We've got five permanent states of the Security Council responsible for some 85 per cent of the arms sales. This country, I believe, is close to 60 per cent of that."

This is going to take "tremendous commitment and discipline," he emphasised. "But if we do not deal with arms sales, I do not think we are going to deal with the Middle East and we are not going to deal with Iraq."

Here, he pointed out that several countries in the region are well armed — Iran, Turkey, Syria and Israel — adding that the Iraqis at present are the weakest military power in the area.

Halliday argued that economic sanctions against Iraq alone would not work without returning "the management of Iraq to its government." He underlined that the money earned from the diminished capacity of oil exports within the oil-for-food programme "could not get the job done."

In his opinion the "six billion dollars do not begin to address the needs of Iraq — they probably need 10-15 billion dollars per year." Since oil prices are not expected to rise in the near future, he confirmed credit has to be provided for the Baghdad regime.

The only option here is postponement of the compensation payments, now amounting to one third of the oil revenues, to such countries as Kuwait.

Or else, he warned correctly, "We are pushing Iraq in the direction of a dangerous political rightist activity" in the manner of Afghanistan. "We do not want to see an Iraqi Taliban movement developing."

Footnote

WHAT BETTER way to pay tribute to His Majesty King Hussein, than to translate at least some of his wishes into acts and deeds. This is exactly what has started to be done when Justice Minister Jawdat Shouf submitted a formal proposal to amend the penal code that commutes sentences of murderers who commit the so-called "honour crimes." Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor have spearheaded the call for such a change in the Jordanian legislation to put an end to this anomaly in our legal system which has been condemned by the International Criminal Court as being discriminatory and unconstitutional. The proposal was submitted by the Royal Commission for Human Rights, which is headed by the King's son Prince Ghazi. The idea is to replace the death sentence passed on perpe-

tators of crimes of honour, who can expect no more than three months to a year's imprisonment. Many sociologists and advocates of women rights groups have long been protesting Jordanian laws on honour crimes which appear to encourage rather than prevent the 25 to 30 such crimes committed annually. It is up to the Cabinet to approve the necessary amendment of Article 340 before it is passed on to Parliament.

A murder is a murder whatever its pretext and should be punished accordingly. As recently as last week, a woman and her son was murdered by her son's wife and another woman who falsely accused her of an "affair" relationship only to be proven innocent after a forensic examination.

Waleed M. Sadiq

tion. The killer was driven by family pressure to "cleanse" the family honour. Islam does not condone such punishment. Relatives cannot take the law into their own hands, and when they do they should be prosecuted as common criminals. Verdicts in sexual crimes are adopted after scrupulous examination of evidence. The admissibility of evidence is so stringent that no less than four witnesses are required to testify against the offender before any conviction can be made. Against this backdrop, sociologists, religious leaders and criminologists should sit together and formulate a balanced and enlightened solution to this travesty.

Letters to the editor

Baptism site must not be turned into theme park

ONE OF this century's most significant archaeological discoveries is that of the baptism site, now confirmed to be on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

Excavations by a national team from the Department of Antiquities at Wadi Al Kharrar as it is known in Arabic have revealed the existence of at least twenty individual archaeological sites.

In what could be described as a complete biblical village containing five churches and a network of canals and water basins, the spring feeding the baptism basins still yields water to this day. The Vatican's authentication of the site has been regarded as a great triumph for Jordan against those who would have claimed its existence elsewhere.

It greatly saddens us that the grandiose tourism plans compiled by the Jordan Valley authorities for the site leave little to the imagination, and to many seem to defeat the idea of preserving an essentially unique spiritual site by turning it into what could best be described as a commercial theme park.

An urgent revision of the "development" plans should preferably be undertaken by an experienced organisation such as UNESCO, or one of our own efficient environmental NGOs and religious authorities: I do not think that many would welcome the proposal of hastily erecting several buildings containing imaginative outlets such as a planned carpet souk, a conference hall and a rest house in order to meet the deadline of the year 2000. The ingenious idea of digging a well into the spring could jeopardise the whole water source, never mind the ecology around it.

What would be best is to keep human intervention to a minimum by utilising removable objects such as tents, which could be used to accommodate visitors without damaging the beauty of the site. Tourism could also be developed to benefit the local community in the same manner that the Dana Nature Reserve was managed. This site has survived for almost 2000 years, let's not bury it under the cement of modern buildings under the guise of development.

Ghazi Saudi
Amman

Education and a 'high-skill' society

UNDER THE title "Plan for huge rise in university numbers," The Guardian newspaper published an article on its front page written by John Carvel, its education editor on Monday March 8, 1999.

Following are extracts from it:

"Tony Blair is planning a huge expansion of universities to ensure that at least 50 per cent of young people under 30 participate in higher education... It would form part of a second-term strategy to turn Britain into a high-skill society competing in the global economy by virtue of brain-power and innovation... The students would be encouraged to secure academic qualifications

Features

Jordan Times, Wednesday, March 10, 1999 7

By Ben Laurance

CARL LINDNER is not yet a familiar name in towns on the Scottish borders. But in Washington his is a quiet, persistent voice that cannot be ignored. He is simply too rich, too influential. He is too great a financial ally of the political machine to be resisted.

And it is his success in turning an arcane disagreement over bananas into the most serious transatlantic trade dispute for a decade — now threatening more than 1,000 jobs in factories producing cashmere knitwear — that has cast a spotlight on Lindner. The chief executive of Chiquita is the key figure in the trade dispute between the U.S. and Europe over protecting Caribbean economies.

Over recent years, Lindner has given more than \$1 million to the Democratic Party — in part from the companies he controls and in part from his own pocket. His generosity helped win him an invitation from Bill Clinton to sleep at the White House in Lincoln's bedroom.

But Lindner has also lent corporate jets to Republican Bob Dole to help the politician tackle the rigours of the 1996 presidential campaign. In September last year, Lindner gave \$100,000 to the National Republican Congressional Committee and the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

An evenhanded political pragmatist, then? No. Lindner, 80 this year, is a lifelong rightwing Republican. His largesse in supporting both political parties has won him huge influence and contacts. His enthusiasm for making sure that his voice is heard at the Washington policy-making table has arguably, this weekend, put at risk the jobs of thousands of

British and Continental European jobs in industries making goods ranging from cashmere and biscuits to bubble baths and novelty magic tricks. The way in which he has managed to marshal heavyweight support is remarkable. Bob Dole is clearly a supporter. So is Trent Lott, Dole's successor as Majority Leader in the Senate. Newt Gingrich backs Chiquita, as does Senator John Glenn, the former astronaut. And Congressman John Gephardt, the House Democratic leader.

The issue at the heart of the row is access to the European market for bananas. For Chiquita — one of the world's largest banana conglomerates which Lindner became involved with in the mid-eighties — this is a huge prize. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall, American-owned banana companies — Dole, Chiquita and Del Monte, who between them control nearly two-thirds of the world market — believed that they would be able to increase sales enormously to Eastern Europe. They invested heavily to expand their plantations, principally in Latin America.

But the hoped-for growth in sales failed to materialise. East Europeans failed to buy enough bananas and returns on the money invested were meagre.

It was against this background that the American banana giants, of which Chiquita is the largest, found themselves examining the market in the rest of Europe.

When Britain had joined the Euro-

pean Community in 1973 there had been lengthy negotiations covering preferential trade arrangements with its former colonies.

These included protection for commodities, including bananas, from African, Pacific and Caribbean producers. Twenty years on a version of the arrangements was still in place and the U.S. giants wanted it dealt with.

For impoverished Caribbean islands, the effect of losing the preferential treatment from the EU would be devastating. In the mid-nineties, it was estimated that the tiny island of St. Lucia alone gained around \$7.5 million a year as a result of the European regime.

Now, this clash — between American banana companies and European countries trying to soften the blow to the U.S. and EU into head-on conflict.

But at every stage in the saga, the publicity-shy Lindner has been quietly nudging the elbow of the key decision-makers. He pushed the Chiquita case — that Europe should open its market to unfettered competition from the American banana giants — at meetings with U.S. trade representative Mickey Kantor. The man who helped to arrange those meetings over breakfast at the Watergate Hotel was Bob Dole, Majority Leader in the Senate, the man who horroed Lindner's jets.

Kantor has been an enthusiastic advocate of the Chiquita/Lindner position. Kantor's office is thinly staffed, but has devoted remarkable resources to fighting the EU through the World Trade Organisation, even though there are very few American jobs at stake.

Despite his huge political donations, Lindner has not had every-

thing his own way. His donations to the Republican congressional and senatorial committees last September preceded a move by House Republicans to introduce a Bill which would have forced (not merely permitted) the Clinton administration to impose sanctions against the EU if Europe failed to toe the line on bananas.

Lindner would have loved to see such a Bill enacted. In the end, it was pulled when the administration agreed to give a public commitment to what action it would take if the EU was too intransigent. And last week that commitment became reality with the imposition of sanctions against a string of EU exporters.

Lindner can well afford to buy some political influence. He has become one of the richest men in the U.S.: his personal wealth has been put at \$830 million and that of his family at well over \$1 billion.

His political friends — Dole, Glenn, Lott — wrote to Bill Clinton and to Kantor pressing the Chiquita case. They even pressed for the U.S. to take action against Colombia and Costa Rica for having the temerity to deal with the EU which tacitly acknowledged their acceptance of the European banana regime.

Bananas and American influence-peddling have had a long and close association. Notoriously, the CIA organised a coup in Guatemala in 1954 on behalf of the United Foods Company, corporate predecessor to Chiquita.

No one is accusing Lindner of going to the extreme of urging coups. But his influence within Washington power circles cannot easily be resisted.

— The Observer



Carl Lindner:

The man and his money

Born: Dayton, Ohio, 1919

Education: Dropped out of high school to help run the family's dairy business when his father became ill.

Career: In 1940 he and his brothers borrowed \$1,200 to open an ice-cream store.

Today: United Dairy Farmers have 200 such stores. Profits enabled him to buy savings and loans companies.

He now heads an empire, American Financial Group, worth \$14 billion.

Personal wealth: \$830 million.

Personal habits: A strict Baptist who never drinks, smokes or swears.

Friends in high places

John Gephardt: The House Democratic leader is a supporter of Chiquita, Lindner's giant banana enterprise. The right-wing Republican Lindner has donated more than \$1 million to the Democratic Party.

Robert Dole: Lindner lent the Republican candidate a corporate jet during the 1996 presidential campaign. Dole later arranged meetings with U.S. Trade Representative Mickey Kantor at which Lindner pressed the case for Europe to be opened up to U.S. banana exports.

Newt Gingrich: The Republican former Speaker of the House of Representatives is among Chiquita's backers.

Irish 'bandit country' longs for normality

By Elaine Monaghan
Reuters

SOLDIERS CALL it bandit country. Locals call it God's country. Strangers shudder at road-signs warning of IRA snipers and stare at the British army helicopters buzzing over South Armagh.

Rarely is the symbolism of and sympathy with the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) fight against British rule more evident than in County Armagh, whose wriggly border marks the end of Northern Ireland and the beginning of the 26-county Republic of Ireland.

For Irish Catholic Republicans, Northern Ireland is six occupied counties which generations of Irish men and women have struggled to liberate with guns, politics and foreign lobbying.

Almost a year since a peace deal was signed to global jubilation on April 10, Republicans in South Armagh complain they have had no peace dividend.

The snipers went off duty when the IRA called a ceasefire first in 1994 and again in 1997, easing the path to peace.

But constant British surveillance continues, with roadside cameras and a network of 33 watchtowers to aid the army and Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) police, local people say.

For Republicans, the police station encased in metal, army barracks buried in fertile fields and armed forces who stop them regularly to check documents are a sign that Britain and its forces are not ready to let go of the colonial past.

"It seems as if the army and RUC want to ratify cages until something happens," local businessman Declan Fearon said in an interview at his home in the village of Jonesborough, where a watchtower looms on the hill above his house.

Snipers on hold, suspicions intact at least on the surface, life here has changed little in the year since politicians sought to set aside centuries of enmity between Protestants and Catholics with the power-sharing peace deal.

The mounting toll of soldiers shot by snipers and attacks on a barracks at the town of Crossmaglen had halted with the truce.

No one has taken down the authentic-looking road signs with an IRA sniper staring down the barrel of a gun.

Wooden letters nailed vertically to lampposts declare "IRA" and 10 white crosses on a roadside verge commemorate prisoners who starved themselves to death for the IRA.

The labyrinthine country lanes, cloud-swathed mountains and expansive bush-studded valleys complete the impression of a picturesque hiding place for armed Republicans.

One visible effect of the accord was the removal of a checkpoint on the Belfast to Dublin road nearby — though it was a bit of a fig leaf. Security forces always had difficulty policing the area's bewildering network of roads.

These days suspicion of Britain is only slightly muted.

Farmers and businesspeople mounted a campaign 18 months ago to draw attention to the military presence which they now say is increasing and flies in the face of provisions in the accord for demilitarisation as the security threat is reduced.

Vietnam's communists face uphill struggle

By Dean Yates
Reuters

Vietnam's elderly former prime minister Pham Van Dong once said fighting a war for independence was easier than running a country.

The current generation of Communist leaders might agree.

Myriad challenges hover over the Communist Party — a slowing economy, disheartened foreign investors, rising unemployment, widespread discontent over corruption and a massive population of young people expecting a better life than their parents.

Moreover, there is a danger that the party's indecisive leadership might dash the growing expectations among 79 million people eager to tap economic reforms adopted a decade ago.

All of this adds up to a rather uncertain future, political analysts said.

A nation that has known little but conflict and deprivation this century risked slipping off the world's radar screen, said Robert Temple, author of "Shadows And Wind," a book on contemporary Vietnam.

"Vietnam is not really in a crisis, more a slow-burning descent into international irrelevance," he said.

"Those who control international capital are sceptical of (economic) reforms and don't see significant prospects... The government is also unwilling to address political reform which is essential for real economic change and development."

Many foreign businessmen fed up with bureaucracy and high costs have already written Vietnam off as an investment destination in the short term.

Hanoi has made clear the government will reform the economy at its own pace, focus on mobilising internal resources and keep a tight lid on political controls.

Alluding to internal ills, Communist Party General Secretary Le Kha Phieu early in February listed a catalogue of woes such as graft and disunity afflicting the party and said conditions were ripe for attempts to sabotage the regime.

But political analysts said the party was not about to split — or the population rebel — anytime soon despite the economic difficulties in one of the world's poorest nations.

They said Vietnam's Com-

munist Party was remarkably resilient and had adapted before to major hurdles involving independence wars, famine and then collapse of its benefactors in the former Soviet bloc.

"The party system is not brittle. Vietnam's one-party state will continue to change and adapt," Carlyle Thayer, a Vietnam expert at the Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies in Hawaii told Reuters.

"There is no opposition movement or personality capable of challenging its authority let alone toppling it."

"The greatest challenge comes from below as individuals in the villages and cities attempt to evade state authority and conduct their lives without reference to the party," he said.

Some analysts said the biggest immediate threat to the party was official corruption, a curse that has prompted hand-wringing among senior party members and sparked violence in some rural areas and widespread discontent.

In May the party will launch a two-year campaign of criticism and self-criticism to try to cleanse the ranks of its 2.3 million members. But the question of public accountability, always a sore point in Vietnam, would likely remain sticky.

Officials have said results of the campaign would be an internal party matter.

Calls for change are voices in the wilderness nevertheless, many Vietnamese still seem quite sanguine about the future, partly because their predicament little more than a decade ago was so awful.

The wild card could be the youth — a staggering 41 million people born after the Vietnam war ended in 1975 that so far have avoided bucking the political system but who expect to find jobs and enjoy a better life than their parents.

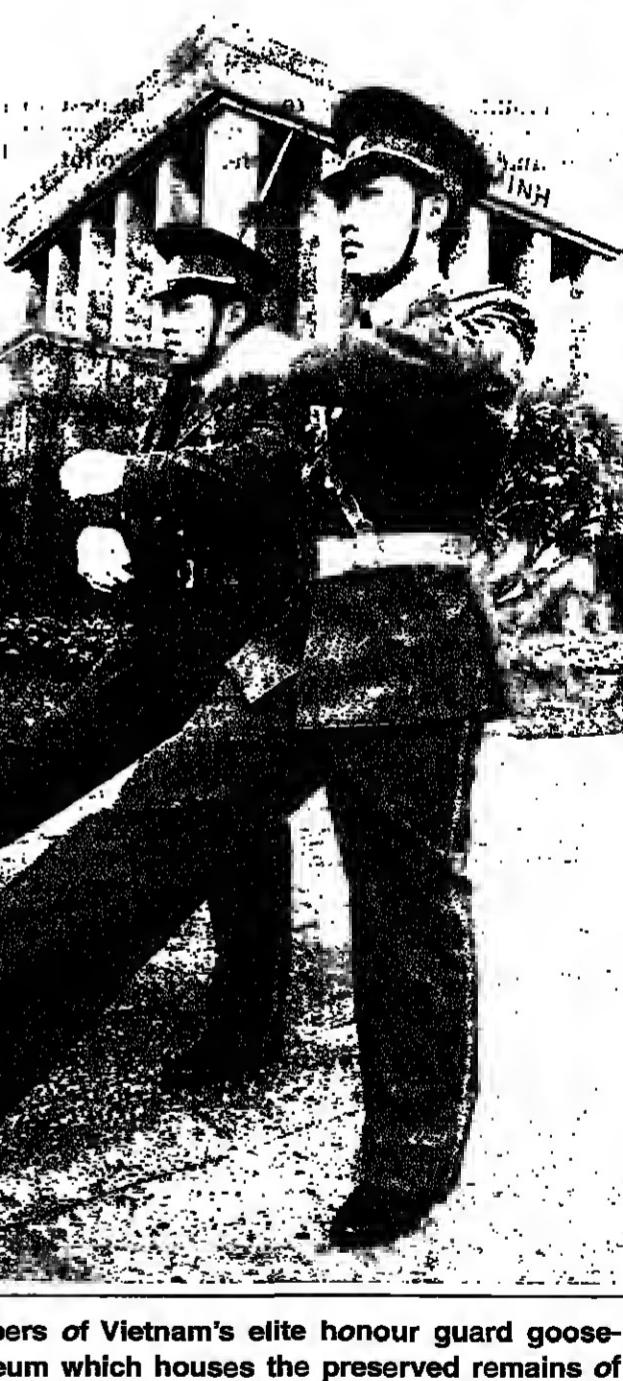
Indeed, at this stage only a small group of hard-core dissidents and retired officials such as General Tran Do, a life-long revolutionary, have been willing to publicly criticise the party and call for political reform.

The party expelled Do in January and since then letters from several retired officials expressing concern at his treatment have circulated, but this was not enough to greatly challenge the party, according to analysts such as Thayer.

William Turley, a Vietnam watcher at the Department of Political Science at Southern Illinois University, said the party's response to rural unrest in Thai Binh province in 1997 showed it could assess and adjust to pressures from below.

Local corruption and abuse of power in Thai Binh sparked violent protests that shook the party and prompted Hanoi to remove dozens of provincial officials.

This was a key plank for Hanoi's legitimacy, they added.



OUT OF STEP? Members of Vietnam's elite honour guard goose-step past the mausoleum which houses the preserved remains of former revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh at a regular changing of the guard ceremony at Ba Dinh square in central Hanoi (Reuters photo)

the Australian National University.

Economic growth this year is forecast at around three per cent by most economists, compared with the government's official figure of 5.8 per cent last year.

Vietnam specialist Ari Kokko from the Stockholm School of Economics said he believed the country could manage slower growth in pure economic terms for some time.

"But I think the big question mark shows up in the political stage. Would people accept the strict controls that would be brought by slower growth? Even more importantly, would people accept losing hope?" he asked.

Arab Monetary Fund: Gulf economic reform 'unlikely'

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Any major reform in the Arab Gulf states' economies is "unlikely" in the short-term even as their revenues shrink as a result of plummeting oil prices, the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) said Tuesday.

"Most probably, the crisis will continue to be perceived as a temporary cash flow problem ... drastic economic reform is unlikely to be envisaged at least for the time being," the AMF's Director General Jassim Al Manai said.

The Gulf's reaction to rising budget deficits "could vary from postponement and cancellation of capital expenditure to borrowing," both domestically and externally, "drawing from reserves and further partial privatisation," Manai told a conference here.

The oil-dependent Arab Gulf states have seen revenues wane since oil prices started falling 15 months ago. Although some attempts have been made to cut-back on lavish state expenditure, few have made any fundamental economic changes.

But Manai warned that most Gulf states' "budget structure is so rigid that the margin of manoeuvre seems to be very limited ... governments can't any more afford to maintain the status quo."

"Old conventional economic practices are neither appropriate nor viable ... fiscal discipline should then become the order of the day."

Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) central bank governor said Tuesday the slump in world oil prices is forcing Arab Gulf states to rethink government financing and the private sector will be key to this.

"The fall in oil prices has put enormous pressure on resources and on Gulf governments and there is a fear that the current level of oil prices may continue for some time to come," Governor Nasser Al Suweidi said.

"To prevent debt levels from increasing further other means of financing government expenditure should be devised," he told a two-day conference on energy, infrastructure and finance in Abu Dhabi.

Oil-producing Arab Gulf states have been hard hit in recent months by the slide in world oil prices, which remain the lynchpin of their economies — and their budgets have suffered accordingly.

Al Suweidi said the burden on government finances could be partially alleviated by measures such as introducing property taxes, some form of corpo-

rate tax and increasing customs duties.

But he added that shifting some services and projects, such as housing, manufacturing, health, communications and even higher education into the private sector would also save the government a lot of money.

"The time has come for the private sector to use its potential and rise to the challenge," Al Suweidi said.

"It has been thought of and is being implemented to a certain extent in the UAE in the areas of healthcare and education for example," he said, adding that more of such moves were needed across the Gulf.

Privatisation has recently become a pressing issue for Arab Gulf governments, most of whom are attempting to diversify their economies away from dependence on oil.

Another important element in funding would be some repatriation of funds from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries that are held abroad.

"Some estimate that there is more than \$600 billion in private and public funds from the GCC invested outside the region," Al Suweidi said.

The GCC comprises the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain.

Britain promotes computer revolution in new budget

LONDON (AFP) — Britain's government launched Tuesday a drive to put the British at the forefront of the information technology revolution, saying that this was the future of the world economy.

"This industry is the great driver of world economic growth today. And Britain can no longer afford to lag behind America," Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown said as he presented the annual budget to parliament.

He said that mastering the Internet, e-commerce and computer-based work was "the most decisive economic challenge of the 21st century."

Brown announced 1.7 billion pounds (2.5 billion euros, \$2.8 billion) in funds to enlist "schools, colleges and companies, public and private sectors across the board to make Britain a leader in the information economy."

"Our target is a national network of 1,000 computer learning centres, one for every community in Britain. They will be in schools, colleges, libraries, in Internet cafes and on the High Street," Brown said.

This network would mean that Britain is equipped for the "information age" because those "left out of the new knowledge revolution will be left behind in the new knowledge economy," he said.

"Our targets for the new economy are ambitious: Within three years, one million small businesses able to benefit from e-commerce; 32,000 schools connected to the Internet, with 370,000 teachers computer-trained."

Brown nonetheless retained his economic growth forecast of 1.0 to 1.5 per cent this year.

This is despite a 50 per cent reduction in world growth, a 50 per cent fall in British exports to Asia and the fact that one quarter of the world is in recession.

"The storms may come again but because of what we have done, our economy is now better prepared to weather them," a bullish Brown told parliament.

He predicted that inflation would not rise above 2.5 per cent for the next three years.

"Britain can look forward to sustained low inflation," he said.

The chancellor said he would implement tax changes to craft "a dynamic Britain of enterprise and fairness."

He unveiled a tax credit on research and development to give "new business

and small business — the biggest source of innovative ideas — cash help to research and develop their innovations even before they make their first profits."

"At a cost of 150 million pounds a year, this targeted tax cut will underwrite almost one third of research and development costs for small business. Britain now has one of the best incentives for innovation anywhere in the industrialised world," Brown said.

In his third national budget, Brown pledged surprise tax cuts worth four billion pounds (\$6.4 billion, 5.6 billion euros) and painted a rosy picture of the British economy.

The fiscal package for 1999-2000 was aimed primarily at families, small business and the poorest workers.

Brown told parliament that the budget was "a better deal for work, a better deal for the family, a better deal for business."

Central to his tax reductions was a cut in the starting rate of income tax to 10 per cent, its lowest level since 1962, from April and a reduction in the basic income tax rate to 22 per cent from 24 per cent in 2000. Brown said this would be the lowest basic tax rate for 70 years.

The tax cuts I have made today are tax cuts that encourage work and which make work pay," said Brown.

His fiscal promise was made amid a slowdown of the British economy, which is starting to tire after successive crises around the world.

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Two million workers would see their income tax burden cut in half as a result

of the lower starting rates, he said.

Brown also targeted family voters with a raft of tax breaks that he said would ensure that "700,000 children are being lifted out of poverty."

Federal tax credits would be adjusted to give more money to families with young children.

Brown's blueprint of forging "a new enterprise economy open to all" was underpinned by a pledge to cut business taxes from 31 to 30 pence from April.

In addition, Brown said that he would introduce a 10 per cent starting rate for new small companies.

In a break with tradition, Brown promised that alco-

hol tax would be left unchanged "this side of the Millennium," but smokers would have to pay five per cent more tax on their cigarettes and petrol duties would also rise.

In addition to the 40 billion pounds already earmarked by the government to rejuvenate Britain's ailing healthcare and education systems, Brown promised an extra 170 million pounds to cut crime and lavish capital investment programmes for the regions, notably Northern Ireland and Scotland.

For all his fiscal largesse, Brown insisted that "this budget will lock in monetary and fiscal stability for the long term."

Britain would enjoy a budget surplus of four billion pounds this year under new accounting rules, or a public sector net borrowing surplus of one billion pounds under old measurements.

Debt interest repayments would fall by four billion pounds over the next three years and Britain would reap a current budget surplus total, covering day to day government spending of 34 billion pounds over the next five years.

"I can confirm that Britain is well within the Maastricht criteria," said Brown.

OECD warns France over deficit and role of the state

PARIS (AFP) — Reforms have strengthened the French economy but the government is now taking risks with its public deficit and must press ahead with modernisation to reduce the role of the state, the OECD has warned.

The OECD said that "whole chunks of the tax system are archaic or sources of distortions detrimental to growth and employment."

It repeated its standard argument for labour flexibility, noting that French unemployment had fallen significantly, owing in part to use of temporary contracts, but took a sceptical view of the 35-hour week.

Some recent tax measures went in the right direction but overall "modernisation should be conducted without exacerbating the sometimes chronic instability of the sys-

tem."

This was difficult to achieve through "tinkering rather than a general overhaul."

Broad taxation in France was still "excessive." France had considerable scientific potential but bureaucracy and taxation hampered innovation which created the most skilled jobs.

In a stern review of the structure of the French economy, the OECD expressed doubts that a central plank of government policy, a reduction of the working week to create jobs, would have much effect on unemployment.

The OECD also noted that aspects of the finance industry such as regulated savings interest rates "will have to change soon."

It said: "The state has continued to withdraw from the still vast public enterprise

sector... This process must continue as rapidly and completely as the stock market situation allows."

On the positive side, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) noted that in the past two years France had entered a new era owing to the election of a Socialist government, the introduction of the euro and unexpectedly strong growth. There had been a "sharp improvement."

But it also noted that weakness outside Europe now threatened growth in France which had been driven by foreign demand.

Inflation was low and stable in a way which had not been seen for 50 years, owing in part to a collapse of commodity prices and wage moderation in the context of the policy to qualify for the single currency.

New high-tech companies will also be to access a 20 million pounds venture capital fund, Brown said.

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and small business — the biggest source of innovative ideas — cash help to research and develop their innovations even before they make their first profits."

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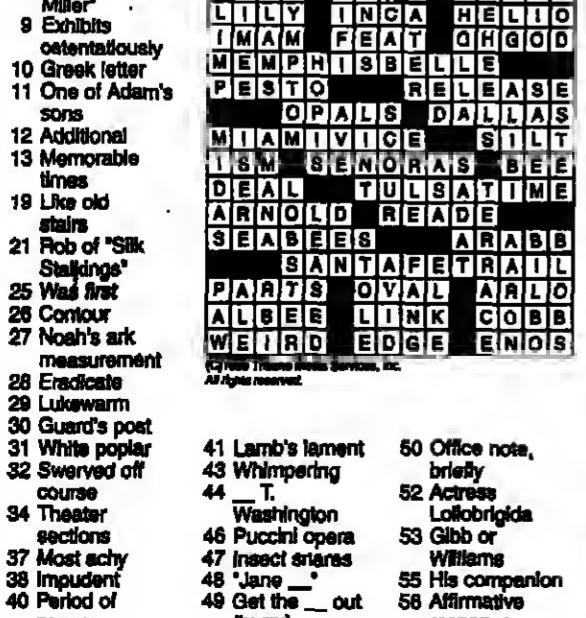
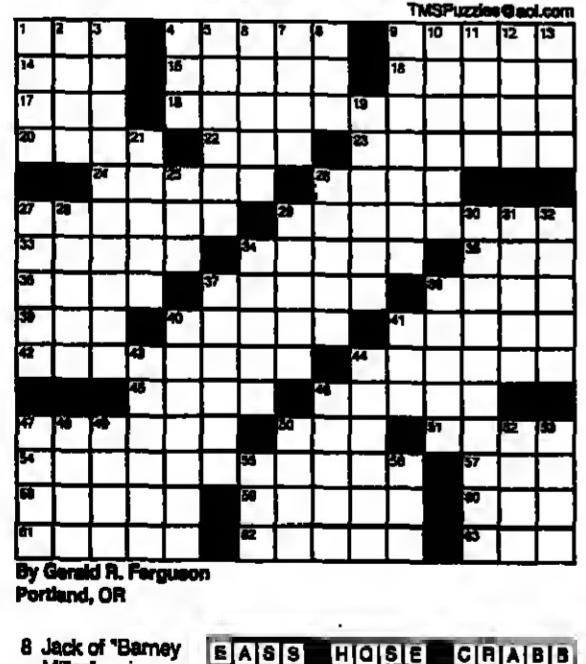
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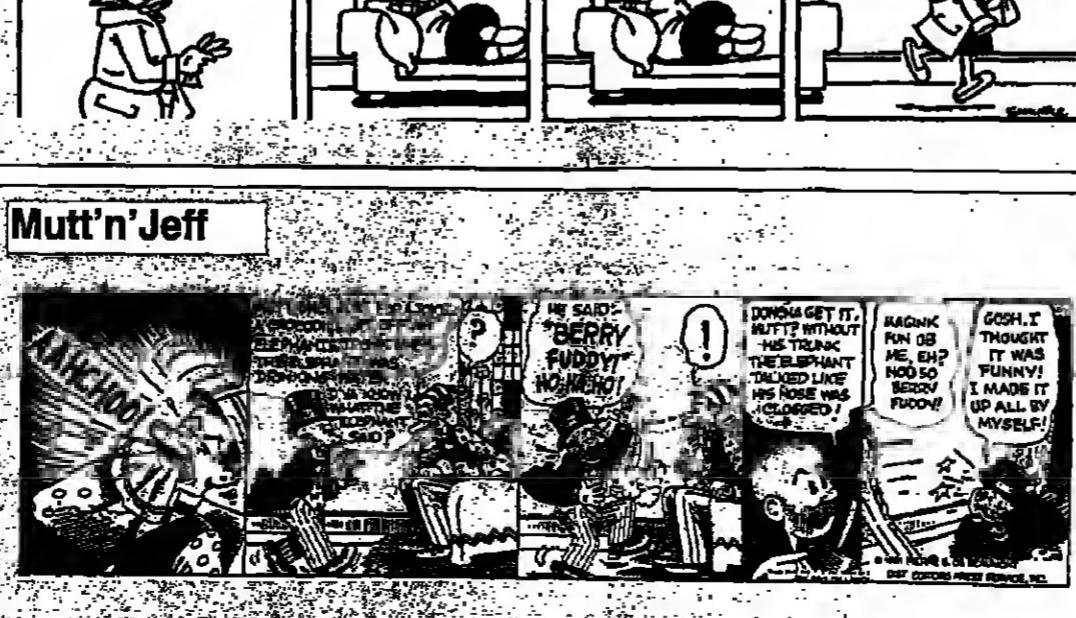
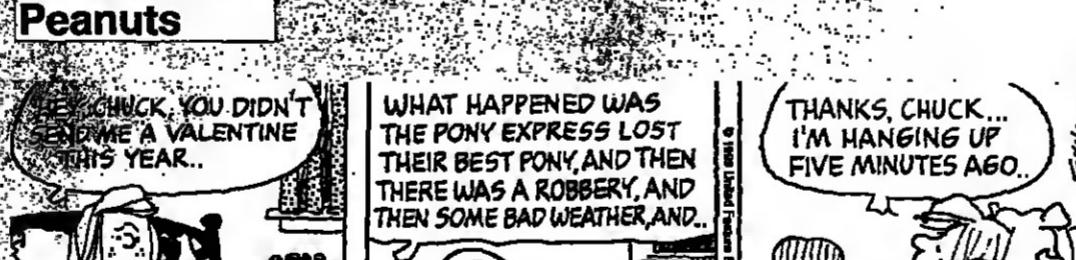
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THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

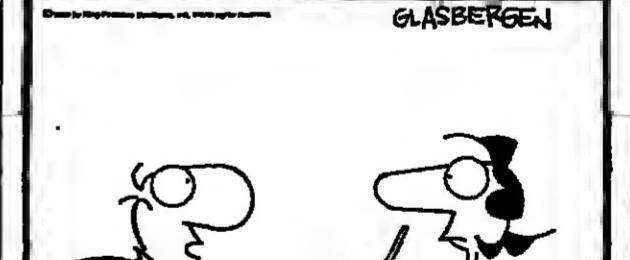


Peanuts



THE BETTER HALF

By Glasbergen



Business & Finance

Daily

Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Tradesmen in Balqa Governorate blame guest workers for being unemployed

TRADESMEN IN THE BALQA Governorate are the most hurt by the recession despite their efforts in seeking work and lowering their charges in an area where there are many plants and where pay is considered low compared to high living costs.

All Awad, a tradesman specialised in electrical installation, said he had worked in this trade for ten years and he had many unskilled workers helping him. "This trade provided me with large income that was sufficient for me and my children," he said. "But a number of years ago, some of the guest workers who learned the trade from me are now competing in the market."

He indicated that the guest workers offered extremely low charges and that despite their lack of skill many people would employ them. He demanded that the Ministry of Labour prevent guest workers from entering the country instead of chasing those who do not carry work permits, noting that employers resort to hiding the guest workers from labour inspectors. Awad also demanded that the ministry specify charges for tradesmen because that is the only guarantee for the Jordanian worker in the labour market.

Mohammad Salem, an unskilled labourer and unemployed for three months, said he assisted a construction worker for many years and earned JD5 for working a full day. "The amount was sufficient despite the big effort I had to put in," he added. Mohammad blamed guest workers for his unemployment because "they work for low pay as they do not have financial obliga-

tions such as water, electricity and housing," he said noting that large numbers of guest workers live in small rooms, eat barely enough and transfer to their countries large sums of money.

Mohammad Abdul Karim, a car mechanic and unemployed for about a year also blames his "extreme" suffering on guest workers from many nationalities. "I learned the trade from very skilled tradesmen in and outside of Salt and when I became pretty knowledgeable about the work, the last person I worked for closed his workshop and since I have been looking for a job," he said.

Mohammad added that Jordanian employers resort to employ guest workers who, due to their large numbers, are willing to work for very low pay. He stressed that certain measures be established to minimise the problem either through reducing the number of guest workers or through intensifying inspection and penalising employers who take non-Jordanian labourers despite the availability of suitable Jordanian substitutes.

Karnan Insebiwat, the director of the Balqa employment office said there are 4,841 guest workers who have valid working permission but there are other large numbers working without permits. He added that such large numbers represent a major problem for tradesmen in the Balqa in light of the few job opportunities. "The problem has become clear as more tradesmen are complaining about this situation," he concluded (Al Ra'i).

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) This would be a marvellous day for romping through fields of wild flowers. If you can get the time off, that activity is highly recommended. But calling in sick is not a good idea, because a secret is likely to be revealed today. You certainly don't want it to be about you doing something you shouldn't be.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Some sort of investment you have seems to be gaining in value more quickly than normal. It's kind of a surprise, really. You might want to check this out. If you have some old jewellery in your safety deposit box, for example, have it reappraised. You may be worth more than you thought.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) A person you've known for years and thought you knew very well could throw you a curve today. You figured you knew what would happen next, but you probably don't. All bets are off as new habits replace old ones. Not to worry. Most of them will be for the better.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) Things on your job are not as you expected, but they could turn out to be more like you'd hoped. That's true whether your job is corporate or domestic. For example, your 2-year-old could suddenly pony-train himself without further help from you. Just because he likes it that way. Stranger things have happened, and today they might.

LEO: (July 23 to August 22) There are all sorts of changes going on in your love life. You may not be changing people, but the person you love is not the same as before. A point you've been trying to get across may finally be sinking in, much to your delight. The exercise programme is really starting to happen, for instance. Congratulations to you both!

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) There's something changing about your place, that's for sure. It could be the furniture getting rearranged, or the living room getting painted, or maybe you decided to move to a better location. Follow your partner's hunch and you should do fine.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Looks like conditions are right for a massive dose of spring fever. Love is in the air, and a couple of surprises are also predicted. You may think you know about love, but you'd be wise to keep an open mind. Don't let a relationship that's long gone get in the way of that's happening now.

SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) The action is hot and heavy again today. You might feel like you're in the middle of a bank zone, but hopefully you really aren't. You will have to pay attention to what's going on, however. Changes are happening fast. You snooze, you lose.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Finish up old business quickly. You need to get on to other things. There are changes you need to put into effect once you get the chance, time and money. Well, you may not have all that quite yet, but it's coming. So take the first step. Let others know about your vision. That's the first step.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Somebody else's disaster could turn out to be your stroke of good fortune. The other person may want to get rid of something quickly, for example, and it's just what you need. You could come across this information in a rather roundabout manner. But the way, it's help if you tell people what you're looking for.

AQUARIUS: (January 20 to February 18) You and your friends can accomplish incredible things today, which you can barely even imagine. You don't have to mastermind all of them, however. Looks like your friends are coming up with some excellent ideas, with only a little coaching from you. Let one of them take the lead.

PISCES: (February 19 to March 20) Changes in big places could affect you, in a positive way. If you're in the right place at the right time, you could benefit financially as well as experience an increase in your status. If this isn't happening yet, better check out the want ads.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper

MAN targets DM1 billion pre-tax profit

MUNICH, Germany (AFP) — German truck maker MAN said Thursday that it was expecting higher sales and pre-tax profit of around one billion marks (510 million euros, \$561 million) in the year ending June 30.

"Sales should exceed last year's level of 24.8 billion marks (12.68 billion euros, \$14 billion)," MAN said in a statement. "And after pre-tax profit of 809 million marks last year, we're targeting a level of around one billion marks."

Business in the period from July to December, which represents the first half of the current business year, developed positively, "despite the raw economic climate," MAN said.

First-half sales totalled 5.582 billion euros, a rise of six per cent from the figure for the corresponding period of the previous year.

Incoming orders slipped by one per cent to 6.01 billion euros (\$6.6 billion), pre-tax profit jumped by 47 per cent to 199 million euros (\$219 million) and net profit was 43 per cent higher at 135 million euros (\$149 million).

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NTL BK	1.520	1.500	-1.32%
BK OF JORDAN	1.320	1.330	+0.76%
THE HOUSING BK	2.890	2.860	-1.04%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.600	1.620	+1.25%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.690	1.680	-0.59%
PHILAELPHIA BK	0.520	0.520	0.00%
BANKS INDEX			
	289.420	289.420	-0.66%
INSURANCE			
ARAB INS	2.050	2.150	+4.88%
INSURANCE INDEX			
	126.080	126.080	+0.60%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.700	1.690	-0.59%
IRIBID ELECTRICITY	1.900	1.900	0.00%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.930	0.920	-1.08%
AL-RAY	7.070	7.050	-0.14%
COMMODORE	1.110	1.100	-0.90%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0.940	0.960	+2.13%
ARAB INT'L FOR INVEST.	1.950	1.950	0.00%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.130	1.130	0.00%
SERVICES INDEX			
	114.240	114.240	-0.11%
INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3.780	3.770	-0.26%
PHOSPHATE	2.330	2.330	0.00%
ARAB POTASH	4.250	4.200	-1.18%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.880	10.850	-0.00%
JO. TANNING	5.350	5.400	+0.93%
THE IND. COMMS & AGRIC	1.080	1.080	+0.95%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	3.110	3.080	-0.96%
CERAMIC IND	1.280	1.270	-0.78%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.630	1.510	-1.31%
JO. PIPES	1.100	1.090	-0.91%
NTL STEEL	0.600	0.530	+6.00%
DAR AL DAWA	6.170	6.150	-0.32%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0.550	0.550	0.00%
JO. STEEL	1.010	1.000	-0.99%
ARAB ALUMINUM	1.790	1.780	-0.55%
CHLORINE	1.200	1.180	-1.67%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.400	0.400	0.00%
NTL IND	0.350	0.350	0.00%
PETRO - CHEMICAL	0.290	0.280	-3.45%
CHEMICAL & VEGETABLE	1.110	1.100	-0.90%
ROCKWOOL	0.280	0.280	0.00%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	0.920	0.970	+5.43%
NTL CABLE	0.510	0.510	0.00%
SULPHO - CHEMICALS	0.440	0.420	-4.55%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.290	1.280	0.00%
KAWTHER	0.350	0.370	+5.71%
EL-ZAT	1.280	1.280	0.00%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.580	0.600	+1.69%
NTL ALUMINUM	0.810	0.820	+1.23%
INDUSTRY INDEX			
	97.170	97.170	-0.59%
PARALLEL			
EXPORT BK 757	0.940	0.940	0.00%
JO. INT'L INS	0.670	0.650	-2.99%
ARAB FINANCIAL INVES	0.500	0.470	-6.00%
AL - EKBAL	0.870	0.880	+1.15%
ADVANCED PHAR	0.520	0.530	+1.92%
AL - SHARQ	1.100	1.100	0.00%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.450	0.450	0.00%
AL DAWLIAH	0.680	0.680	0.00%
ARAB INVESTORS	1.050	1.080	+2.86%
ARAB INT'L TRADE	0.180	0.180	0.00%
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0.320	0.340	+6.25%
CENTURY	1.150	1.150	0.00%
NAMICO	0.180	0.170	-5.56%
MIDDLE EAST PHAR</td			

Seles, Chang bounced out of Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS (AFP) — An out-of-sorts Monica Seles bowed out of the Evert Cup here Monday, one of three top seeds to fall in the third round as World No. 1 Martina Hingis marched into the quarter finals.

Slovakia's Henrieta Nagyova, ranked 27th in the world, dispatched third-seeded Seles 6-2, 6-4 to reach the quarter finals. She'll face Sandrine Testud of France, who laid the ghost of Wimbledon past when she ousted eighth-seeded compatriot Nathalie Tauziat 7-6 (7/3), 6-2.

U.S. veteran Chanda Rubin beat seventh-seeded

Arizona, last week. He'll be replaced in the draw by lucky loser Fernando Meligeni of Brazil.

Nagyova, 20, needed just one hour and five minutes to dispose of the third-seeded Seles.

"My mind definitely wasn't there from the start until the end," said Seles, who was making her first appearance in the tournament since she won the singles title in 1992. "She didn't give me a chance really to get into it."

Nagyova broke Seles twice as she raced to a 4-0 lead in the first set, and Seles never caught up.

"She just played really well," Seles said. "I mean, she was attacking, running down balls, not too many unforced errors. I think her backhand, she hit some really great angles on it."

Testud admitted that she was surprised to see Nagyova's name lined up against her in the quarters.

"I'm the one who lost the first set," she said. "I played poor shots on the two set points. The first set was very important, after that I was less and less in the match."

Testud earned the first service break of the second set in the sixth game to lead 4-2, and broke again in the eighth to wrap up the match.

"It was a relief," Testud said. "That match at Wimbledon was by far the worst match of my career. That's the reason I tried to concentrate as much as I could. The first set was very difficult. We were both tight."

On Tuesday, fourth-seeded Jana Novotna, fifth-seeded German Steffi Graf, No. 6 Mary Pierce of France and unseeded giant killer Serena Williams vie for quarter-final berths.

The men's first round continues and the second round begins. Second-seeded Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov continues his bid to topple Pete Sampras from the World No. 1 ranking with a second-round victory over Brazil's Gustavo Kuerten, a 6-2, 6-4 winner over Thomas Muster on Monday.

Like all the top eight seeds, Kafelnikov had a first-round bye.

Fifth-seeded Australian Pat Rafter and seventh-seeded Briton Tim Henman also play second-round matches Tuesday.

Jan Siemerink from the Netherlands screams after falling during his match against Michael Chang from the U.S. at the Champions Cup in Indian Wells. Siemerink won 7-5, 6-3 (AFP photo)

South African Amanda Coetzer 6-4, 6-4 to reach a quarter final with top seed and defending champion Hingis. Hingis proved immune to the upset bug, easing past compatriot Patty Schnyder 6-1, 6-3.

It was the fourth day of play in the \$1.25 million WTA Tour event, which began sharing the stage with the ATP Tour's \$2.45 million Champions Cup on Monday.

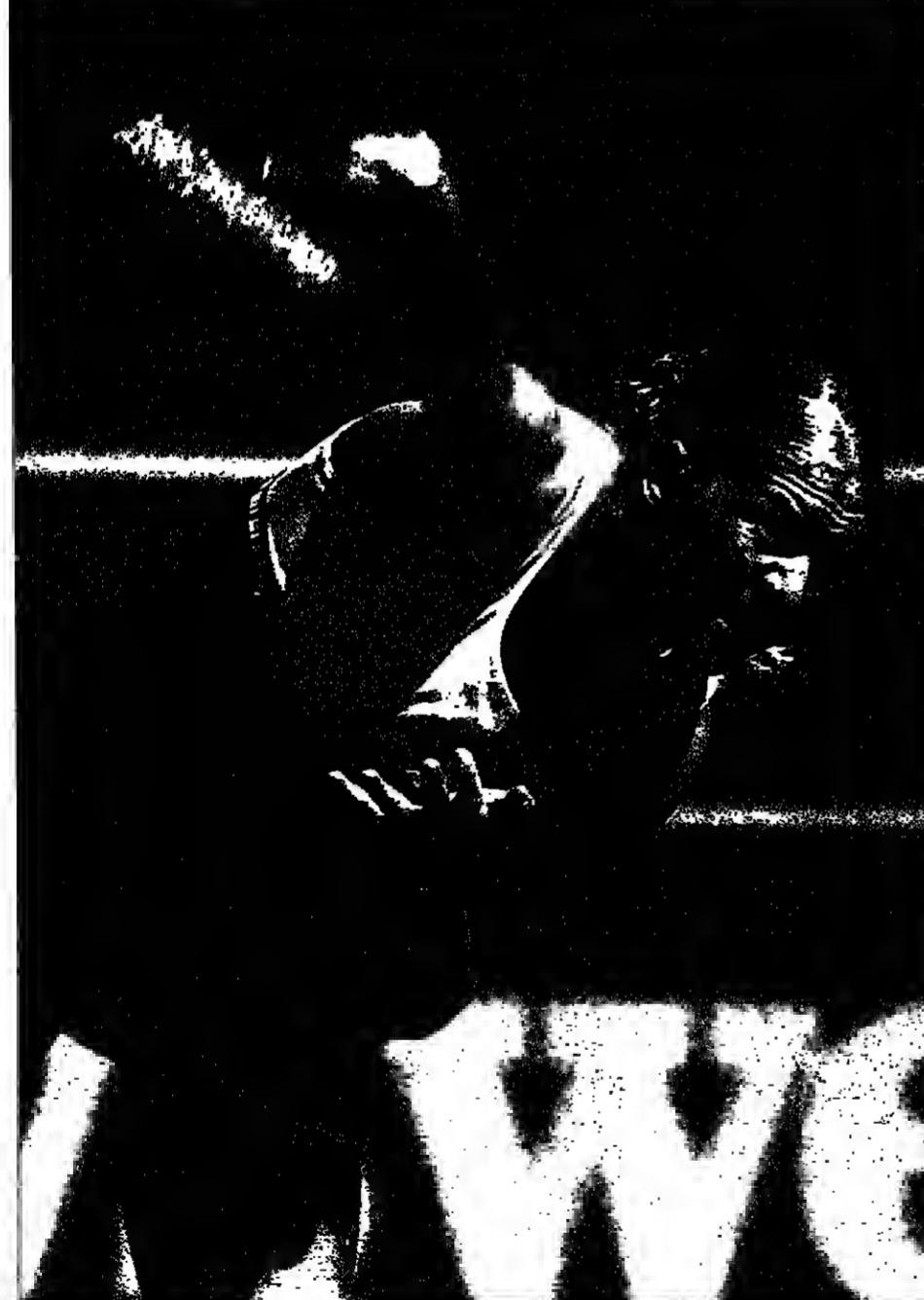
In men's first-round action, Briton Greg Rusedski overpowered Czech Petr Korda 6-3, 6-4, his 11 aces including one of 141 mph.

Russian 19-year-old Marat Safin posted an impressive 6-4, 6-4 victory over Sweden's Thomas Enqvist, and former World No. 2 Michael Chang fell in straight sets to Jan Siemerink of the Netherlands.

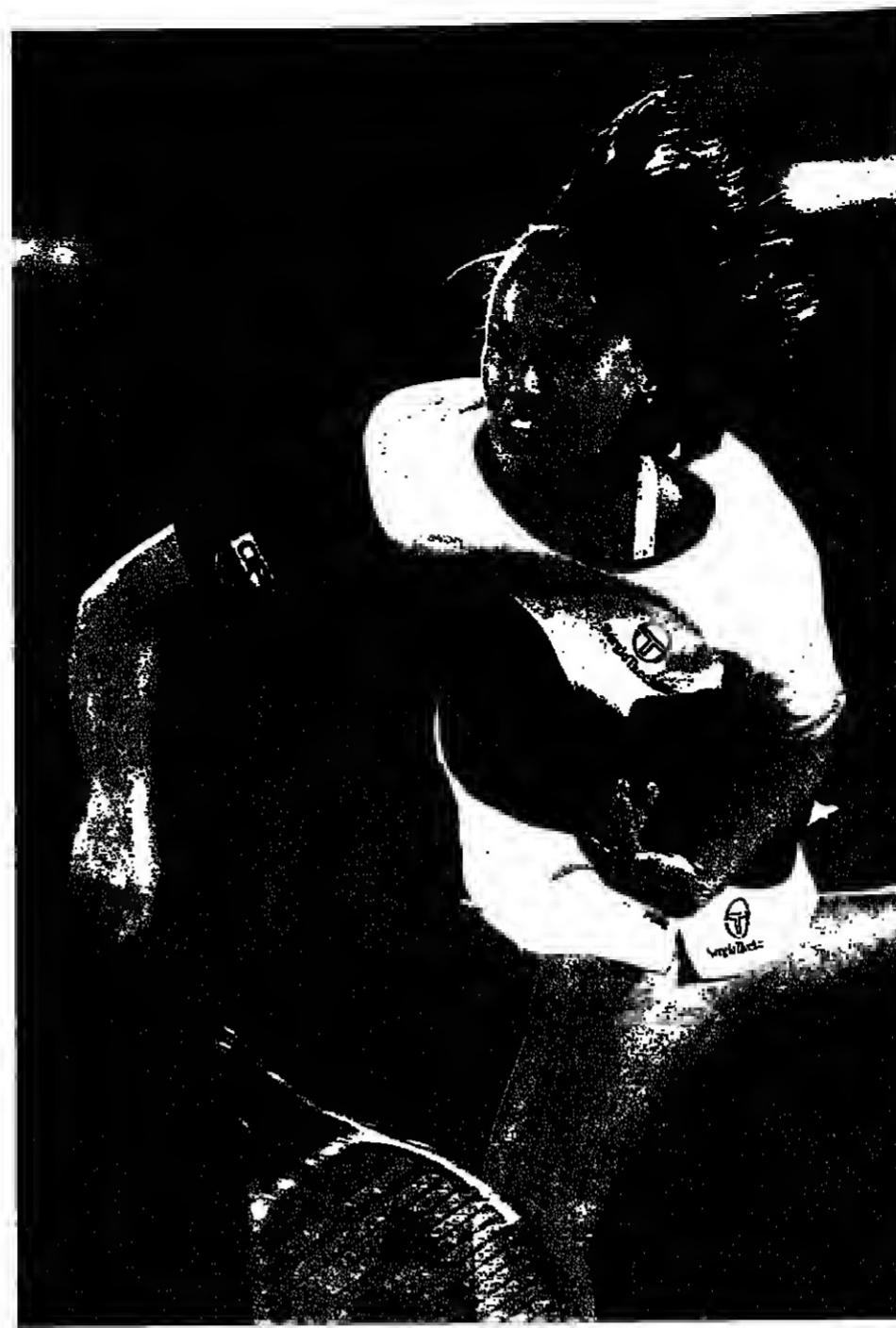
Siemerink fell late in the second set and bruised his hip, an injury he said was painful enough to interfere with his game even though the trainer told him nothing was broken or sprained.

"Luckily I was two breaks up," said Siemerink who led the second set 5-2 when it happened and finished off a 7-5, 6-3 win. "If I was one break up and I lose my serve, then I would be in deep trouble, I think."

The Champions Cup, the first of the prestigious Super Nine events on the ATP calendar this year, lost another marquee name when Andre Agassi withdrew because of the right hamstring injury he suffered during the semi-finals in Scottsdale,



Henrieta Nagyova of Slovakia serves against Monica Seles from the U.S. at the Evert Cup in Indian Wells, California. Nagyova upset Seles 6-2, 6-4 (AFP photo)



Martina Hingis of Switzerland serves against Patty Schnyder of Switzerland during Evert Cup play in Indian Wells, CA. Hingis defeated Schnyder 6-1, 6-3 (AFP photo)

Chang finds steep path back to top

INDIAN WELLS (AFP) — Tenacity, the hallmark of Michael Chang's game, is the trait he is counting on to pull him through the slump that started with his injury-ridden 1998.

"This year hasn't been all that great, it's been quite a bit of a struggle," Chang said after falling in the first round to Jan Siemerink in the \$2.45 million Champions Cup tennis tournament.

It was another disappointment in a season highlighted so far only by a trip to the semi-finals in San Jose, California, in February.

He lost in the second round at Adelaide, Australia, in January, and in the second round of the Australian Open.

After reaching the final four in San Jose, he lost in the second round at Memphis, Tennessee.

"I know in time it's going to come around," said Chang, who couldn't take advantage of a bip injury Siemerink suffered when he fell while leading 5-2 in the second set.

"I feel like it's a matter of time, putting in the hard work and working on things. It's not there for me right now, but it will be."

After on-court treatment, Siemerink was able to shut out the pain of his bruised hip to win 7-5, 6-3.

The 28-year-old from the Netherlands said it was clear Chang wasn't playing up to the form that made him the world's second-ranked player in 1996. But he wasn't prepared to write off the man who will mark the 10th anniversary of his stunning 1989 French Open triumph over Ivan Lendl this year.

"My body's kind of out of sync," he said. "I made some adjustments last year to compensate for my injuries, which really haven't helped me as far as movement and stuff like that."

"You need confidence

to play well," Siemerink said. "I have the feeling he doesn't have that at the moment. I thought he made more unforced errors than he's used to. That has nothing to do with speed, it's just a matter of confidence. You have to win a few matches."

The mild-mannered Chang all but bristled at suggestions that at 27 he was past his prime. After finishing 1997 ranked third in the world, he fell to 29th at the end of 1998 when he battled knee and wrist injuries.

"Part of it is coming back from a year like last year, where I struggled with quite a few bad injuries," said Chang, who still managed to keep his streak of winning at least one title a year alive for the 11th year with two tournament victories.

"My body's kind of out of sync," he said. "I made some adjustments last year to compensate for my injuries, which really haven't helped me as far as movement and stuff like that."

"The only thing I know is a player needs confidence, and he doesn't have it at the moment. When you don't have it, then it's a struggle because the debuts in the game nowadays is unbeatable. Everybody can beat everybody."

"I feel like once those things kind of get smoothed out, I feel like my tennis will be back to where I know it can be."

Certainly he's not close to throwing in the towel.

"I'm 27 years old, I know my best tennis is ahead of me," he said. "Unless I start losing every single first round, or I don't feel like going out and working hard — then I'll know it's time to call it quits."

"Right now, the desire to go out and to work hard both on and off the court is there. I think that's the really important part of it."

Siemerink agreed with that assessment.

"My best year was last year, and I'm 28 at the moment," Siemerink pointed out. "You never know."

"The only thing I know is a player needs confidence, and he doesn't have it at the moment. When you don't have it, then it's a struggle because the debuts in the game nowadays is unbeatable. Everybody can beat everybody."

"You need confidence

Bid chief admits Salt Lake City paid Coles' trips

SYDNEY (AFP) — Australian International Olympic Committee (IOC) member Phil Coles went on paid holidays in the United States as payment for helping Salt Lake City win the 2002 Winter Games, the former head of the bid committee claimed Tuesday.

Tom Welch, forced to stand down as Salt Lake Games chief after revelations he had organised a cash-for-votes policy running to millions of dollars, told the Sydney Morning Herald that Coles had provided invaluable advice on how to sell their city to the IOC members.

Coles has claimed he went on only one approved trip to Salt Lake City during its bidding campaign and paid for other holidays himself.

A Salt Lake City ethics committee has released scores of documents detailing A\$60,000 (\$38,000) worth of lavish holidays run up by Coles and his family in Utah.

But Welch said Coles and his partner Patricia Rosenrock never asked for anything.

"I offered, I never felt exploited by them," he told the Herald.

"I never felt exploited by them," he added. "If anything we exploited them, they brought us to a great deal."

He said Coles "was a continual stream of advice" on everything from licensing arrangements for the sale of Olympic goods to the sale of international television rights to the Games.

Welch defended his policy of offering inducements in the form of cash, shopping trips, holidays and scholarships to at least 25 IOC members and their relatives.

"I don't think Salt Lake City's bid was that much different than anyone else's bid," he said.

"In 1999 we're trying to establish a value system for what was transpiring in a political campaign that took place six or seven years ago in the Olympic bidding process," he said.

He said he had not engaged in anything corrupt.

"I believe the process to be one of excess, not a corrupt process," he said.

Coles has, meanwhile, been urged to explain a gift of diamond and gold jewellery from the Athens team bidding for the 1996 Olympic Games.

Kevan Gosper, the other Australian IOC member and an executive board member, told the Financial Review: "I am encouraging him to come out and explain his position now on this matter."

The Financial Review obtained documents which show the jewellery was valued at A\$10,000 (\$6,000) — well in excess of the 1998 guidelines limited gifts to \$200.

It was alleged last week Coles and his former wife Georgia accepted a set of diamond-studded cufflinks and a gold necklace from the Greeks in 1990.

Athens lost the 1996 Games to Atlanta later that year.

Sports
LOCAL SPORTS

INTERNATIONAL
Olympic Committee
Member Phil Coles

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Salt Lake City's bid for the 2002 Winter Games was successful, defeating Denver and Salt Lake City.

Greg Rusedski from Great Britain serves against Czech player Petr Korda at the Champions Cup in Indian Wells (AFP photo)

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Sports

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LOCAL SPORTS SCENE



Mamser meets federation officials

AMMAN — Minister of Sports and Youth Mohammad Kheir Mamser Wednesday meets with representatives of sports federations to discuss their national teams' programmes for the 9th Pan-Arab Games — Al Hussein Tournament. Mamser, meeting for the first time with the federations, is excepted to request a comprehensive report on problems facing their preparations in order to take necessary steps to solve the obstacles. The vice-President and members of the Jordan Olympic Committee will attend the meeting.

Saudi volleyball to play in Amman

AMMAN — The Jordan Volleyball Federation (JVF) is to host its Saudi counterpart to play friendlies during June 21-25 as part of preparations for the 9th Pan-Arab Games — Al Hussein Tournament. In its recent meeting, the JVF discussed a report on contacts between Minister of Sports and Youth Mohammad Kheir Mamser and Al Wihdat Club, whose players are not taking part in national team's training. The JVF also reviewed recent preparations of holding training camps for the national team in Romania and Cairo during June and July. Arrangements to host the Iraqi men's team and Syrian women's team for friendlies were also discussed during the meeting.

Boxers to get Ukrainian coach

AMMAN — The Jordan Boxing Federation (JBF) will participate in the Egypt International Championship, organised by the Egyptian federation May 19-25. For that purpose, the JBF will contact its Ukrainian counterpart to enlist a trainer within two weeks to prepare the national team for a monthly salary of \$1,700.

Compiled by Ahmad Khatib

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Villa give trial to Indian international

BIRMINGHAM (AFP) — English Premiership club Aston Villa are giving a trial to Indian international striker Bhaichung Bhutia, they announced Tuesday. The 21-year-old has appeared 31 times for his country, scoring 21 goals, and has permission from his club East Bengal to train at Villa Park this week. Villa manager John Gregory plans to assess the player's qualities before deciding whether to invest in a forward who would cost only a nominal fee. Gordon Smith, acting as the player's agent, said today: "Bhaichung is regarded as India's top footballer and Villa are keen to have a look at him. The club have offered him training facilities for a few days to see if he will like it over here and if he feels he can settle. There is a large Indian community within the West Midlands area and the club are keen to search for fresh talent which reflects this."

Silas takes charge of NBA Hornets

CHARLOTTE (AFP) — Paul Silas, who played on three National Basketball Association championship teams, was named to coach the Charlotte Hornets for the remainder of the 1999 season. Silas received the interim job Monday to replace Dave Cowens, who quit Sunday after Charlotte's 4-11 start. Silas teamed with Cowens in helping the Boston Celtics win NBA titles in 1974 and 1976, and after 16 years the duo reunited last season in Charlotte when Silas became an assistant. Charlotte went 51-31 last season but were hurt when injuries dimmed contributions by Anthony Mason and Glen Rice. Both might be on the trading block

as the league deadline for transfers approaches Thursday.

Garside and Van Liew finish third leg

PUNTA DEL ESTE, Uruguay (AFP) — Britain's Mike Garside and America's Brad Van Liew have completed the third leg of the Around Alone solo round-the-world yacht race. Garside is now standing second in class II behind Jean-Pierre Moutoue of France. Van Liew is third in the same class. Van Liew, like overall race leader Italian skipper Giovanni Soldini, who received 24 hours grace for rescuing France's Isable Autissier, will be compensated in time for derouting towards Britain's John Hall, whose yacht demasted in February. Soldini, with Autissier aboard, won the third leg of the Around Alone on March 3. The fourth and final leg of the race towards Charleston, South Carolina, in the United States will get underway on April 10.

Romao takes over as Alverca coach

LISBON (AFP) — Jose Romao was on Tuesday named as the new coach of Portuguese first division strugglers Alverca. Romao replaces Mario Wilson, who was axed after the newly-promoted side lost 3-0 to Campomaiorense in a weekend Portuguese Cup match. Alverca, a club based in the Lisbon suburbs, are currently second bottom of the championship.

Zico launches 'heroes' tourney

MILAN (AFP) — Brazilian legend Zico, England veteran Ray Wilkins and German Andreas Brehme unveiled a star-studded tournament for the over-35s here on Tuesday, dubbed the "Championship of Heroes."

The eight-team invitation-only tournament will be held in Trinidad from June 16-27, featuring Brazil, Italy, Germany, England, France, Spain, USA and the hosts Trinidad and Tobago.

Zico said: "I'm delighted to be back with my teammates from the national side and to be playing against other internationals in a world championship."

Zico, who is calling up old favourites Careca, Branco, Junior and Moser, will also be wooing over-35s who are still playing — including Dunga, Julio Cesar and Bebeto.

Each team can field up to five men still playing top-level football, such as the Serie A or English Premiership. Seven players in each team must have at least 10 international caps, while four must have at least two.

Brehme's squad already has the likes of Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and Rudi Voller and he added: "I'm hoping to get Jurgen Klinsmann."

Bryan Robson, Stuart Pearce, Ian Wright and Peter Beardsley are in his provisional squad, although the offer will also be made to Gary Lineker, now committed to a career in television.

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Wilkins previously had an all-clear from Glenn Hoddle, before he resigned

as England manager over comments about handicapped people.

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Malaysian premier launches Formula 1 circuit

SEPANG, Malaysia (AFP) — Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on Tuesday launched a new 286 million ringgit (\$75 million) circuit which will host a Formula One championship race on October 17.

He said the 5.6 kilometre (3.3 mile) Sepang F1 Circuit near the new international airport would boost Malaysia's automotive industry and become a centre for motor sports development.

"I am amazed ... In less than two years, what was an oil palm plantation has been converted into a world-class racing circuit said to be second to none in the world," he said.

"The Sepang circuit can become a centre for motor sport development not only in Malaysia but also in the region," he said, adding that it would be cheaper for foreign teams to base here.

The Malaysian leader said tourism would also benefit.

"From two billion people watching this event live, there will surely be a sizeable number of them who will want to visit our country. I have been told that all hotels nearby and in the city have been fully booked for the Formula One race in October," he said.

Earlier, reigning Formula One world champion Mika Hakkinen test-drove on the Sepang track and predicted a "thrilling" race in October.

Hakkinen, who made his Formula One debut in 1991 and has 113 grand prix starts to his credit, welcomed the challenge of a new venue but said he was worried about Malaysia's hot weather.

"It's a difficult circuit to drive ... very fast, some demanding corners which need very good skill and a very good car. I like it, it's very good work," he was quoted as saying by the Bernama news agency.

"But the biggest problem is with the heat," he said. "The circuit, which features 15 turns and eight straights, offers ample room for high-speed overtaking.

Within the circuit, there is also a 1.123 kilometre go-kart track, terrain for four-wheel-drive vehicles and a track for companies to test-drive their vehicles.

Malaysia will also host a 500cc world motorcycle championship event at the new circuit next month.

Heat win as Hawks upset Orlando



Alonzo Mourning (C) of the Miami Heat goes to the basket for two points over Philadelphia 76ers' Matt Geiger (R) and Theo Ratliff (L) during second quarter action of their game at the Miami Arena (AFP photo)

8) snapped a three-game losing streak to climb back over the .500 mark.

Allen Iverson collected 28 points, six boards and five assists for the 76ers (10-8). Losers of three straight, who were outscored 25-17 in the final quarter.

In Orlando, Steve Smith scored 24 points, including the go-ahead layup with 1:16 to play, as the Atlanta Hawks held off hot-shooting Nick Anderson and handed the Orlando Magic their first home loss of the season 114-110.

The Hawks blew a 10-point fourth-quarter lead before Smith rebounded a missed jumper by Alan Henderson and made a layup to give Atlanta a 105-104 lead.

Atlanta, benefiting from a three-day layoff, appeared to be the fresher team down the stretch. The Hawks (9-

10) notched their seventh straight victory, 92-73 over the Vancouver Grizzlies.

Jimmy Jackson had 21 points and seven rebounds for the Trail Blazers, who limited Vancouver to only 34 per cent (25-of-73) from the field and made 12 steals while forcing 20 turnovers.

Sunday, Portland held Houston to 31 per cent shooting and forced 19 turnovers in a 111-71 rout of the Rockets.

The Blazers ran their record to 14-3, one game better than Utah and Orlando for the NBA's top 10.

In Vancouver, the Portland Trail Blazers posted another dominant defensive effort and improved on the league's best record by

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King pays tribute to Armed Forces for defence of Jordan, Arab Nation

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Tuesday paid tribute to the Jordan Armed Forces for their sacrifices in the defence of Jordan and the Arab Nation.

Addressing the units of Al Hussein Second Mechanised Battalion, King Abdullah said: "I am delighted to be amongst you and see in your faces the face of the late King Hussein and hear his voice. I can hear his voice and see his face in every member of the Jordan Armed Forces and Jordanian citizens."

"This battalion has a special status in my heart and in the heart of the Jordanian people because its history is well known, particularly its heroic deeds at Sheikh Jarrah, Bab Al Wad, Latron and other places in Palestine," said the King, pointing out that this battalion counts 150 soldiers killed in action and many more wounded in battle and has been awarded the highest military medal.

The King said that the late King Talal served as one of the battalion's officers and that it was this

battalion which trained Palestinian freedom fighters before 1948.

"You all know that this battalion has a special status in the heart of our leader the late King Hussein who named it after him, and this is my first visit to the unit since the late King entrusted me with the most important responsibility in the Kingdom," King Abdullah continued.

"We have all learnt from our leader the late King Hussein to sacrifice our life for our homeland and Field Marshal Kababneh to discuss issues of concern to the Armed Forces.

continue the march, and your heads will remain high, bowing only to God," the King said.

The King, who was accompanied by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Field Marshal Abdul Hafez Mira'i Kaabneh and the King's Adviser for Military Affairs Hmeidi Fayed, was presented with the battalion's green badge.

King Abdullah later called at General Headquarters and met with Field Marshal Kababneh to discuss issues of concern to the Armed Forces.

His Majesty King Abdullah inspects a unit of Al Hussein Second Mechanised Battalion on Tuesday (Photo courtesy of the Jordan Armed Forces)



Israel asks U.S. envoy to press Syria on Lebanon

TEL AVIV (R) — Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Arens has asked the United States to press Syria to rein in Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon, an Israeli official said on Tuesday.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk will meet Syrian President Hafez Assad in Damascus next Sunday to discuss resuming stalled Israeli-Syrian peace talks after Israel's May 17 general election.

Syria has 35,000 troops in Lebanon and is the main powerbroker in the country.

Two recent Hezbollah attacks that killed seven Israelis have stirred new debate in Israel on the Israeli occupation of a 15-km deep zone in south Lebanon and its 1996 understandings with Syria and Lebanon on rules of engagement with the guerrilla group.

"He [Arens] asked Indyk to check in Damascus the possibility of halting the erosion of the Grapes of Wrath understandings," said Arens' media adviser, Avi Kalshev.

The understandings, reached after a 17-day offensive against Hezbollah in 1996 that Israel code-named Grapes of Wrath, bar both sides from striking at or from civilian areas. Some 200 Lebanese civilians were killed in the Israeli offensive.

Arens, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party, has criticised the understandings, which were negotiated by the previous Labour-led government.

In remarks published in Ha'aretz newspaper on Monday, Arens said the understandings put Israel at a "big disadvantage that limits the army's capability in the security zone and leaves the army relatively exposed."

Israel says the pro-Iranian Hezbollah operates from civilian centres to shield

itself from Israeli reprisals. "[But] abandoning the understandings, which are tantamount to an agreement with international connotations, is not an easy task," Ha'aretz quoted Arens as saying. The defence ministry confirmed the newspaper quotes were accurate.

The newspaper said Arens asked the army to suggest alternatives to Israel's current deployment in Lebanon.

Netanyahu has pledged to withdraw from south Lebanon if Beirut deploys forces to the border and dismantles Hezbollah.

Lebanon and Syria demand an unconditional Israeli pullout, arguing that this is laid down in U.N. Resolution 425 accepted by Israel last year.

Indyk's visit to the region does not include a stop in Israel, although a U.S. embassy spokesman in Tel Aviv, Larry Schwartz, said Indyk "plans a trip here early next month."

He said Indyk hoped to prepare the ground for fresh talks following Israel's national poll.

"It's not realistic to resume negotiations on the Syrian track before the Israeli elections," Schwartz said.

Israel and Syria held intermittent peace talks between 1991 and 1996 but failed to agree on their key dispute — the fate of the Golan Heights which Israel occupied in the 1967 Middle East war.

Syria wants Israel to hand back the strategic plateau in exchange for peace, a price Arens said was not worth paying.

"There's no chance of reaching an agreement with the Syrians without completely surrendering the Golan Heights," Arens told Ha'aretz.

"Anyone who says differently is deluding himself and the public. Personally, I think we must not pay this price."

Lebanese army ready to deploy after Israeli pullout — defence minister

BEIRUT (AFP) — The Lebanese army is ready to deploy in southern Lebanon once Israel ends its 21-year occupation of the border strip, Lebanese Defence Minister Ghazi Zaatari was quoted as saying Tuesday.

"The army is ready and capable of deploying everywhere on national territory. The first mission of any army is to defend the country's borders," Zaatari told the leading newspaper Al Nahar.

"This means that when the national territory is liberated from the Israeli occupation, it is clear that the army will deploy along the border" with Israel, he said.

Israel has repeatedly expressed readiness to pull out from southern Lebanon if Beirut provided security guarantees.

But Lebanon demands an unconditional withdrawal in line with a 1978 U.N. Security Council resolution. Resolution 425, which calls for an immediate

Israeli army puts removal of settlers on hold

ITAMAR (AFP) — The Israeli army has put on hold a plan to forcibly remove a group of Jewish settlers who illegally occupied a hilltop near the West Bank city of Nablus, military sources said Tuesday.

The small group of settlers established a makeshift camp several weeks ago on a hill near the settlement of Itamar on the outskirts of Nablus.

The Hebron settlers are opposed to a reopening of the road to Palestinian traffic.

"The army proposals do not correspond to the promises we've received from the government," said Noam Federman, a spokesman for Jewish settlers in Hebron.

Military sources said the pressure had led to a suspension of army plans to forcibly evacuate the group.

Meanwhile, Jewish settlers in Hebron have temporarily shelved a plan to set up four more mobile homes in the Tel Rumeida enclave in the divided West Bank city, military sources

said.

The Israeli army had agreed to allow the mobile homes to be put in place but had demanded in exchange that the settlers allow Palestinian motorists to use a road closed since 1994 which runs along the line separating the Palestinian and Israeli-controlled sectors of Hebron.

The Hebron settlers are opposed to a reopening of the road to Palestinian traffic.

"The army proposals do not correspond to the promises we've received from the government," said Noam Federman, a spokesman for Jewish settlers in Hebron.

Military sources said the pressure had led to a suspension of army plans to forcibly evacuate the group.

Following the murder of a settler rabbi in Tel Rumeida in August, Netanyahu promised the Hebron settlers they could move into permanent housing in the Tel Rumeida enclave.

Hebron is a flashpoint for Israeli-Arab violence due to the presence of 400 Jewish militants who live in several enclaves guarded

Israel destroys W. Bank home of Palestinian family

AL JIB (AFP) — The Israeli authorities early on Tuesday demolished a large West Bank house belonging to a Palestinian family who live overseas, local residents said.

The eight-room house, built in 1997 in this village just north of Jerusalem, belonged to Isa Abdul Rahim Assaf, who lives with his family in Venezuela, villagers said.

A spokesman for the Israeli army's civil administration in the Palestinian territories said that the house, which was sited near the Jewish settlement of Givat Ze'ev, had been destroyed because it was built illegally.

"They [the family] were given an order to stop building when they were building the house and were told to take it down when it was finished," Lieutenant Peter Lerner told AFP.

Israel routinely destroys Palestinian homes in areas occupied by the Jewish state in 1967 on the grounds they were built without proper authorisation.

Palestinians counter that Israeli authorities rarely issue building permits for homes in what Israel considers sensitive areas around Jerusalem or near Jewish settler enclaves and roads.

West Bank and Gaza Strip with more than 155,000 residents. The Palestinians say that violation of the peace agreements which prohibit "unilateral actions" that change the status of the occupied territories.

Nobel laureates urge Clinton, Blair to end strikes on Iraq

BAGHDAD (AP) — Two Nobel peace laureates on Tuesday urged U.S. President Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair to end the bombing on Iraq and to allow the lifting of U.N. sanctions.

The plea was made by Mairead Corrigan Maguire of Ireland and Adolfo Perez-Esquivel of Argentina who arrived here Sunday as part of a New York-based international peace activist group, Fellowship of Reconciliation.

The activists visited schools and hospitals, including a cancer ward to see the effects of the economic sanctions imposed in 1990 to punish Iraq for invading Kuwait.

The United States and Britain oppose the lifting of the sanctions, saying President Saddam Hussein's government remains a threat to his neighbours and to his own people.

Meanwhile, Iraq says, shortages of medicines and nutritious food because of the sanctions

have killed tens of thousands of children.

"This is genocide. Children are dying slowly and painfully," said Perez-Esquivel.

"I have seen children dying with their mothers next to them and not being able to do anything," said Maguire. "They are not soldiers."

Maguire who shared the 1976 Nobel peace prize for her efforts to end the violence in Northern Ireland has long campaigned against using military force against government.

U.S. and British warplanes have bombed Iraq regularly since mid-December in retaliation for being challenged by Iraqi air defences. The allied planes patrol Iraqi skies to prevent the Iraqi air force from striking opposition groups. Iraq considers the patrol planes intruders.

Maguire said Clinton should help bring peace in Iraq just as he helped forge the peace deal in Northern Ireland.

"We, in Ireland, are grateful for what he has

accomplished with the help of... Blair and will be more grateful if they work together again to stop sanctions and bombing of Iraq," she said.

Clinton, Blair, Saddam and U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan should sit together for a dialogue "in order to end this suffering," she said.

Perez-Esquivel seconded that. He said: "We call on the president of America, the vice president and the congressmen to come to Iraq and see the little children and Tony Blair, the U.K. government and Kofi Annan to come and to go to the cancer ward and give us an answer... what was their crime?" Perez-Esquivel, who opposed a military dictatorship in his native Argentina, won the Nobel prize in 1980.

He was arrested in 1977 and tortured for opposing the Argentine army's 1976 coup, then spent 14 months in jail and another 14 months under house arrest.

He, Maguire and the other activists left Baghdad Tuesday.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ocalan formally appoints lawyers

ANKARA (AP) — Imprisoned Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan has formally appointed two lawyers to defend him from charges of treason, the Anatolia news agency said Tuesday. The agency, quoting police officials, said Ocalan named Ahmet Zeki Okcuoglu and his brother Selim Okcuoglu as his lawyers on Monday during the presence of a notary. It was not immediately clear whether Selim Okcuoglu would agree to take up the defence, but his brother Tuesday appealed to the prosecutor's office in Ankara asking permission to see his client for a second time since he was captured Feb. 15, it said. According to private NTV television, Ahmet Zeki Okcuoglu would travel to the heavily guarded prison island of Imrali in the Sea of Marmara on Wednesday to confer with Ocalan if authorisation is granted.

Iraq says \$500m in deals blocked

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq on Tuesday accused U.S. and British representatives on a U.N. Sanctions Committee of blocking contracts signed by Baghdad worth almost half a billion dollars. The United States and Britain, the commerce ministry charged, were "pursuing a policy of collective extermination of the Iraqi people, by all available means." It said the two countries were blocking 268 contracts worth a total of \$496 million from the last two phases of the U.N. oil-for-food programme, which runs in six-monthly term. The contracts covered electricity, drinking water, education, agriculture, medicine and food, the ministry said, accusing London and Washington of aiming "to kill as many children, women and elderly people as possible."

Israel arrests Hamas militant

HEBRON (AFP) — Israeli security forces arrested a militant from the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) on Tuesday in a town south of Hebron, Palestinian sources said. Ghassan Abu Salih, 35, was taken from his house in Dura in the early hours of the morning, the sources said.

Turk security kills three leftists

ANKARA (R) — Turkish security forces have shot dead three far-leftist guerrillas from a group which planted a car-bomb in a central Turkish town last week, killing three people, state-run Anatolia news agency said. Three Turkish Workers and Peasants Liberation Army (TKKK) rebels were killed in the clash with troops in a village near the city of Tokat, it said in a report issued late on Monday. Operations were under way throughout the area to track down further members of the Maoist guerrillas thought to be hiding out in the region's rugged mountains and dense forests.

11 killed in mine blast in Sudan

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Eleven people have been killed and five seriously injured in a landmine explosion in southwest Sudan's Samaha district on the Bahir Al Arab River, a Khartoum newspaper reported Tuesday. The daily Alwan quoted province commissioner Kuntul Sid Ahmed as saying that the injured, who included an engineer working on a local road under construction, were taken to a nearby hospital. The pro-government paper said the mine was planted by rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).



Masked boys held after first condom purchase

FUERSTENFELDBRUCK (AFP) — Police briefly held two masked teenage boys after they spied them entering a gas station in this southern German town in order to buy condoms. Too embarrassed to ask for the prophylactics, the 14- and 15-year-old boys had pulled nylon stockings tightly over their heads before shopping at the station but caught the eyes of the policemen who happened to drive by. When the pair left they were looking down the policemen's drawn firearms. "This could have ended badly," a police spokesman said Tuesday. As the condoms had been paid for, police set the pair free after questioning after the incident on Monday.

Watchdog group complains about U.N. dog

UNITED NATIONS (R) — How much is that doggie at the United Nations? About \$150,000 a year, according to a U.N. spokeswoman. The cost of the bomb-sniffing U.N. canine was raised by Ambassador Nazareth Inera of Costa Rica at a meeting of the General Assembly's "watchdog" Administrative and Financial Committee. Indignant that the number of security guards assigned to assembly President Didier Opertti of Uruguay had been reduced to one from two, she wanted to make the point that the United Nations was not on such a short financial leash as generally supposed.

Battle royal over Tongan's house

HILLSBOROUGH (R) — They say a man's home is his castle, and one would expect that to be doubly true for the reigning king of Tonga. But King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV has found himself embroiled in a battle royal with his neighbours in this wealthy San Francisco suburb, where complaints over plans to expand his four-bedroom house are becoming shrill. "It's simply unacceptable," Hillsborough neighbours David and Nancy Kaiser complained to town officials in a petition. "When the king is in town, hundreds of cars come and go daily... There is often noise well into the evening and, most appalling there is almost always garbage scattered up and down the roadside."

Sun sends 2,000 soft toilet rolls to British troops

LONDON (AFP) — The top-selling British newspaper The Sun on Tuesday announced it was sending 2,000 rolls of soft toilet paper to the country's troops in Macedonia after complaints that army paper was too hard. The paper said it had learned from a British army magazine that the 12,500 troops in Skopje to join a possible NATO peacekeeping force for Kosovo had said the recycled paper issued to them was "like corrugated cardboard." Teamming up with manufacturer Andrew, The Sun said it had launched "Operation Loo Roll" to help "our boys in the Balkans." An army spokesman was quoted as saying: "We are delighted."

U.K. quiz show double faults on tennis question

LONDON (R) — What is the minimum number of strokes with which a tennis player can win a set? A 29-year-old British warehouseman won 125,000 pounds (\$200,000) on a television quiz show by giving the wrong answer. The Daily Mirror reported on Tuesday. Faced with four choices, Tony Kennedy went for the obvious — but incorrect — answer and said 24. The computer on the popular prime-time "Who wants to be a millionaire" show immediately doubled his winnings and let him play on until he stopped to take his 125,000 pounds in winnings.

Nationalists hurt food at filmmaker